

Gender performances as a response to accelerationism
Self-destructive masculinity in the post-internet music of Death Grips

Ville Juhani Kenttä

Master's thesis

English Philology

Faculty of Humanities

University of Oulu

Spring 2019

Table of contents

1 Introduction	3
2 Description of the study material	6
3 Theoretical Background	7
3.1 Post-internet music	8
3.2 Theory of accelerationism	14
3.3 Internet subculture discourses	18
4 Contextualizing Death Grips	23
4.1 Death Grips as a post-internet band	23
4.2 Depiction of accelerationism	25
4.3 Representation of subculture discourses	34
5 The postmodern condition of “living on a stage”	39
5.1 African-American identity	40
6 Masculinity in crisis	47
6.1 Sensory angst and blurring lines between body and technology	47
6.2 Transgression and rebellion	52
6.3 The <i>No Love Deep Web</i> album cover	56
6.4 Gender and sexuality in post-internet music	60
6.5 Posthumanism and <i>Artificial Death in the West</i>	64
7 Modes of audience interaction	70
7.1 Switching between registers	70
7.2 Internet after cyberutopianism	75
7.3 Implications of new discourses	77
8 Conclusion	82
9 References	85

1. Introduction

In this study I will analyze the band Death Grips to find how their art and their overall “aesthetic” reflects the questions of masculine identity and gender. To do this, I will investigate their musical content along with its visual accompaniments as well as their other actions that can be considered a part of the conceptual whole. Death Grips are a band from Sacramento, California, consisting of band members MC Ride (vocals), Flatlander (recording engineering) and Zach Hill (drums, producing). Since their first release in 2010, their musical style has been most persistently described in the music press as experimental hip hop although that definition is commonly followed by an addendum noting how difficult their music is to categorize since it contains influences from a variety of different genres such as punk, noise and industrial music (Boyer; Pistol).

Much has been written about how abrasive the band is, especially for a band operating in the hip hop framework. There are noted similarities to more sonically extreme genres of music in Hill’s aggressive drumming, Flatlander’s distorted sounds and Ride’s shouted vocals of which the latter often merits mention as the band’s most singular element. The aggression of the vocal delivery serves to highlight the content of the lyrics which are often presented in a stream of consciousness styled broken syntax that some have labelled “impressionist word salad” (Corrigan) and although they are often vague enough to warrant differing interpretations, they do regularly portray intensely violent actions and a wide variety of other transgressive behavior. In a rare interview, Ride described the artistic intent of the lyrics as such:

Lyricaly, Death Grips represent the glorification of the gut...the id..summoned, tapped, and channelled (sic) before being imprisoned and raped by the laws of reason... (Ride qtd. in Murray).

Yet many critics also noted, especially during their most high-profile era in 2012, that Death Grips were a very “of the moment” band, some suggesting they were the most important band in hip hop (Boyer; Carr), if not altogether the most important current musical act (Barth) or the most important one of the 21st century so far (Gieben). How is it that a band this abrasive and antagonistic in both their artistic content and extra-textual actions was embraced as so important? One key aspect is perhaps that alongside all the violence depicted in the lyrics are reoccurring descriptions of sensory overload due to information technology’s omnipresence in the modern world, desensitization due to too much audiovisual information as well as paranoia due to living under constant surveillance. Also present in their lyrics is a sense of living on the outskirts of society that the band members

have described as being reminiscent of their own lives in Sacramento, relating the experience to “living in a third world in a first world country” (Hill qtd. in Cooper). Any direct relation to their own experiences must be considered vast exaggerations due to the lyrics’ heightened depictions of criminal activities and survival by the skin of their teeth. Still, the veritable relation of the lyrical content to existent issues in contemporary society has led some to position Death Grips’ lyrics to a dystopian context (Halligan) and likened the lyrical approach to the metaphor of the artist as a canary in a coal mine, serving as an early warning before the situation gets drastically worse (Fantano 2017). In this case, the comparison of having a third world experience in The United States seems to be an expression of ever-growing economic inequality in a late capitalist society. While the lyrics – and the band’s actions – may suggest an anti-capitalistic defiance at times, the depicted reaction to it is not so much an articulated attempt to upend capitalistic structures as it more often is a turn towards nihilistic and self-destructive tendencies.

Yet despite the prevalent expressions of techno-anxiety and anti-capitalistic tendencies, Death Grips have used the internet to great advantage throughout their career and their attitudes towards technology usage sometimes veers close to a futurist embrace of all things modern. In particular, several music critics have noted their densely produced music in itself evokes a sense of information overload which the band has confirmed as an intentional effect:

ZH: We want to keep things on a day-to-day level where we can talk about being out of your mind on drugs and all those other, less-heady things that are totally real to our lives and just as relevant as the more abstract aspects. So it's weird to be like, "Our band is like the internet!" But actually it kind of is: You have all the lowest-level activity side-by-side with the highest intellect also happening within the same realm.

Pitchfork: That's easily the most fascinating thing about the internet to me-- you're the same two seconds away from watching TED lectures or some porn.

ZH: Totally. And people are doing both those things at once. We want our music to work the same way: all at once. (Greene)

The band’s ambivalent attitude towards information technology is a key factor in inspiring critics to champion them for capturing the zeitgeist in music. Death Grips are one of a handful of acclaimed musical artists that have been defined as post-internet art, a loosely defined genre that is generally about the internet’s effect on aesthetics, culture and society. In this case, the effects are linked largely to identity in crisis, a fracturing of self that manifests itself as blurring lines between body and technology, alienation, paranoia and antisocial behavior. These are similar to many of the

themes revolving around the political and social theory of accelerationism, particularly the more pessimistic branch of accelerationists who see the future of humanity influenced largely by technology to the point of supplanting anthropocentric society.

In my view, Death Grips differs from more playful and, in terms of gender performance, progressive contemporaries in the post-internet genre in that the group depicts a toxic masculinity, exemplified by aggressive and sexist language, violent actions and also self-destructive behavior with heavy drug abuse and suicidal tendencies. In part this can be considered a desperate response to a dystopian form of accelerationism that leaves the depicted protagonist to try and survive by any means necessary.

Additionally, the band has been cited as treating its approach to art as an open source collaboration with not only their audience but also with the general public. The way that the band interacts with their audience on uncensored message boards significantly influences their processual approach to art and allows the audience to co-construct the in-flux meanings of their works. As the band has increasingly veered from traditional promotion and deliberately obscured their presence in various ways, the audience's participation in actively expanding their work through memes increases in importance. This anonymous group of transgressors is not only crucial to how Death Grips is defined but also in how it makes them part of a larger phenomenon of similar internet discourses influencing the political mainstream in recent years. Largely tied to 4chan, this type of activity of young men creating transgressive memes and spreading outrageous discourse while hiding behind anonymity and an ambiguous tonal distance has created movements and developments in politics that have been described as the first real signs of accelerationist ideas distinctly influencing the mainstream.

2. Description of the study material

In analyzing the band, I will not limit myself to study only the musical content available on their recordings, as post-internet art acknowledges, noted by Michael Waugh, that

the musicians' videos, social media and self-promotion are all now just as important as their sounds; in Post-Internet music, the sonic document is rarely consumed in isolation from these other phenomena (20).

Therefore, everything done under the denomination Death Grips is text and while the music and the lyrics specifically may be the prime focus, a comprehensive study of their interdependent actions as one cohesive multimedia body of work will help to illustrate some of their reoccurring motifs and key themes that relate to a post-internet framework. This includes their album covers, promotional pictures, their various approaches to live performances, social media posts and interactions, and uploading their music on the internet in noteworthy ways, whether it be as encrypted files on the deep web or a deliberately leaked album against the wishes of their record label. As the post-internet genre also involves a processual approach to creating art, I will study how their audience has interpreted and further redefined their work.

In situating the band in the genre of post-internet music, I will also compare the band to other artists in the genre and, in addition to the music, this material also includes music videos, live performances and social media presence. For the purposes of this study, the most valuable material for comparisons is included from artists SOPHIE, Mykki Blanco, Holly Herndon, Grimes, Future Brown, and FKA Twigs.

3. Theoretical background

The theoretical background for this study is divided into three sections. The first section will delve into the fairly recently coined genre definition ‘post-internet art’ and more specifically ‘post-internet music’. It is a loosely defined genre that originated from the field of visual arts in the late 2000s and expanded into the music world shortly after. Understanding post-internet music as a genre offers an opportunity to note how Death Grips are in many ways part of a larger trend in popular music but also to see what specific implications are to be inferred in their diverging from these commonalities.

The second section focuses on the political theory of accelerationism which focuses on many of the prevalent themes in post-internet music. I will specifically compare Death Grips to other artists to describe how their depictions seeped in toxic masculinity stand out from other depictions of sexuality and gender in the genre and how it suggests an alternative response to accelerationism altogether.

The third section focuses on the type of male internet user persona that the band frequently engages with and to some extent represent and co-construct in their own actions, found particularly on the uncensored discussions on 4chan and Reddit but applicable to other anonymous message boards as well. Their subculture discourse, characterized by a postmodern tonal distance and a “for the lulz” attitude towards its own transgressions, makes its level of sincerity deliberately ambiguous and is thus able to encompass a variety of stands behind the discourse. By adopting the outrageous memes and prankish discourse of this subculture, political transgressors such as alt-right have then been able to exploit this ambiguity in bringing their ideology from message boards to contemporary political discourse.

To sum up, accelerationism in its different manifestations is the through-line in this study. Accelerationist pop or accelerationist music have been proposed as apt terms to also describe post-internet music and also, the above described political discourse and its direct results, such as Donald Trump’s presidential election and the vote for Brexit, have been described as the first mainstream manifestations of accelerationist politics.

3.1 Post-internet music

To define post-internet music, first one has to define post-internet art. For the sake of consistency, I will use the spellings ‘post-internet art’ or ‘post-internet music’ in this thesis except if some of the direct quotations vary the spelling with capitalization or omission of the hyphen. Origins of the term are not entirely clear but one likely originator might be the visual artist Marisa Olson who herself used it first in 2008 to describe her own work, later clarifying her original intent as such:

I meant to refer to art that a) couldn't / wouldn't exist before the internet (technologically, phenomenologically, existentially) and b) was in the "style" of or "under the influence" of the internet in some way (Olson qtd. in Souter).

Regardless of the origin, there is a consensus that the term began to emerge in visual arts before the end of that decade. Most of the written word about the art movement dates itself to the past few years, as of 2019, since culture writers are now able to analyze the movement in hindsight and recognize shared commonalities. Photographer and culture writer Cody Rooney describes the genre as

a movement that is consciously created in a context which assumes the centrality of the internet as a network. All things internet are used as its source material, including aesthetics and social implications (or ramifications) [...] The post internet engages in and comments on the changing nature and saturation of the image, the circulation of cultural objects, the politics of participation, the new understandings of materiality and of the self, the idea of a hyperreality and the obsolescence of the physical (Rooney).

The prefix ‘post’ is not meant to indicate a time after the internet, instead to imply “an awareness of its medium, sources, audience and its limits” (Defraene), thus having a somewhat similar approach to other post-prefix musical genres building on the stylistics of pre-existing genres. Of course, internet is a medium and not a genre. Notably, ‘all things internet’ are referred to as material for artists but in addition to that there are no specific stylistics assigned to the genre except for conceptual and thematic commonalities.

One of the more significant artists in post-internet art, Jon Rafman, describes that the digital age engenders a

general sense of entrapment and isolation felt by many as social and political life become increasingly abstracted and experience dematerialized [...] There is no viable or compelling

avenue for effecting change or emancipating consciousness, so the energy that once motivated revolution or critique gets redirected into strange and sometimes disturbing expressions”
(Rafman qtd. in Rooney)

His most famous art work, *9 Eyes* is an ongoing process in which he collects striking images found from Google Maps, captured by the nine mounted cameras of a Google Street View car, and then posts them to his Tumblr page. The pictures themselves are presented with no text to contextualize the often bizarre-appearing scenarios and the artistic process consists merely of searching for worthwhile material and curating it to Rafman’s own audience.

The *9 Eyes* project, later published as a book, displays a tendency to reflect on experiences with the internet by repurposing found material for content, as Mark Gens notes that many artists employ “prevalent downloading and re-purposing of images and texts from seemingly endless, and sometimes uncredited, internet sources” (Gens). Additionally, critics have noted the transcendence over traditional perspectives on authorship in how “art is a process rather than a product” (Rooney) and that can include the notion that authorship is shared with the viewers as well who, instead of a passive experience, will “collaborate through interactivity and postproduction” (Gens).

It seems that many of the musical artists associated with this art movement have a working knowledge of its origin in the visual arts world and might have ever been involved directly with it. At the very least they have adopted a similar outlook in their approach to art, as Michael Waugh illustrates in his interviews of multiple post-internet artists for his doctoral thesis on the genre:

[They] are not merely musicians, but are instead operating within spaces that previously would have been dedicated to multimedia artists. Sound, image and identity are rapidly becoming interdependent – the Internet enables a genuinely interactive audiovisual experience – and thus Post-Internet music is not just a sonic phenomenon (Waugh 20).

Pieter Defraene argues that due to the internet enabling the possibility of reaching a wide audience, artists have been more willing to experiment and trust in finding an appreciative audience through global networks. The full extent of internet at their disposal along with this experimental approach has been described as

cross-pollination across space and time [...] saturated with references ranging from high art to pop culture, from clubscenes to intellectual music, from gunshots to Renaissance instruments [...] collages pulling inspiration and elements from everywhere and anywhere (Defraene).

Instead of the aforementioned lack of specific stylistics assigned to the genre, post-internet artists are most often associated with some genre of electronic music and the assigned post-internet prefix has been described as a “conceptual fluid current within experimental electronic music” (ibid.). However, the artists do share similar aesthetics which Defraene describes as

hyper-saturated music [...] it can be abrasive, unnerving and at times chaotic or uncentered. The feel of it is very technological; as if the beats and textures are a direct audible translation of electronic pulses passing through a bunch of network cables all twisted and bundled together (ibid.).

The aforementioned referencing to other works is often characterized by heavy use of samples and especially ‘micro samples’, short pieces of audio that are

highly distorted and hardly recognizable after being passed through all kinds of filters and effects. It is this excess of distortion that brings to the foreground the use of the technique itself as a way of processing the real to make it more virtual [...] laying bare that what you eventually hear is miles away from its origin (ibid.).

In many ways, post-internet music can be seen as a continuation of trends in electronic music, particularly vaporwave which in its sonic style is characterized as

sample based, layering and warping pieces of the most reviled forms of music in the recording era: chintzy 80s lounge, smooth jazz, Muzak. Sometimes producers slow down and layer samples till they sound like velvety R&B slow jams, or chop and repeat them to create a sort of languid stutter (Galil).

The artist Macintosh Plus is generally regarded as having created the epitome of the style with his album *Floral Shoppe* (2011) the influence of which was based not only on its languidly reverb-y sonics but also the visual aesthetic:

Countless memes, tributes and homages to the vaporwave aesthetic borrow directly from Floral Shoppe album cover themes: a Roman bust against a neon pink background featuring a city skyline at dusk adorned with Japanese language characters (Glitsos 103).

The prevalent employment of Japanese language characters and other Japanese internet aesthetics in the genre does not relate to any regional allegiance rather than is it merely born from a trend to ‘kitsch-ify’ internet aesthetic (Glitsos 104). In its distinguishing characteristic to spread through online forums without an established geographical location, vaporwave has in fact been described as the “first genre of music to be completely globalized” (Wolfenstein).

More limited in the adherence to its set stylistics than post-internet music, vaporwave samples from “generic forms of mass media” to mimic the “sedative tones of the shopping centre soundtrack that accompanies the consumer in that soundscape” that in its minimal willingness to add something suggesting an artist’s voice, merely echoes other things and is ultimately ‘empty’ (Glitsos 100-103). Although artists themselves have suggested that the genre purposefully satirizes “the emptiness of a hyper-capitalist society” (Ward), vaporwave has often been ridiculed and characterized as an internet meme as much as it has been acknowledged as a micro-genre of music (Minor). Much of post-internet music can seem like an apparent satire of consumer culture as well.



Figure 1. Future Brown *Vernáculo* music video

For example, the music video for Future Brown’s *Vernáculo* (see figure 1) is shot to look exactly like a glossy commercial for fictional beauty products bearing the name of the group, purposefully recreating an aesthetic that a vaporwave artist might be ironically celebrating.

One notable exception to not having a scene based on a specific location is one of the most significant outputs of post-internet music, the London based record label PC Music, although it might be more accurate characterizes as a conceptual art collective that presents itself as a traditional record label:

Many details of the label [...] are unclear, including just how many people are involved. [...] The roster is a rogue’s gallery of aliases, avatars, red herrings, and unknown quantities, [...] each turning out variations on the same set of slick, chirpy, unhinged chart-pop themes (Sherburne)

To describe two of the artists of PC Music whose artist image centers on ongoing performances of their stylized personas, GFOTY is a “hyper-sexualised social networking diva, tweeting about minutiae constantly” while QT is a “glamorous model advertising corporate products (Waugh 120). Taking the uncanny appropriation of the visual language of advertising by Future Brown even

further, QT appears to be the name of the artist, yet it is also the name of an energy drink that the artist is promoting in her only song and music video, *Hey QT*. A real QT energy drink was distributed at QT live performances and made available to purchase online for a limited time. Art and commerce are indistinguishable here as the artist seems to be one and the same with the product, materialized into existence only to promote itself and never to be seen again in any other capacity.

Another noteworthy component of post-internet music is the relation to sexuality and gender. Waugh exhibits connections between queer theory and posthuman theory to describe the resultant 'digital queer' identity that has emerged in post-internet culture:

Queer, initially a homophobic term used to insult LGBTQ communities, was accepted into academic discourse following the publication of several influential texts by Judith Butler (Waugh 157).

Butler's initial writings related feminism primarily to theatre studies but the main concepts are universally applicable as well. She states that

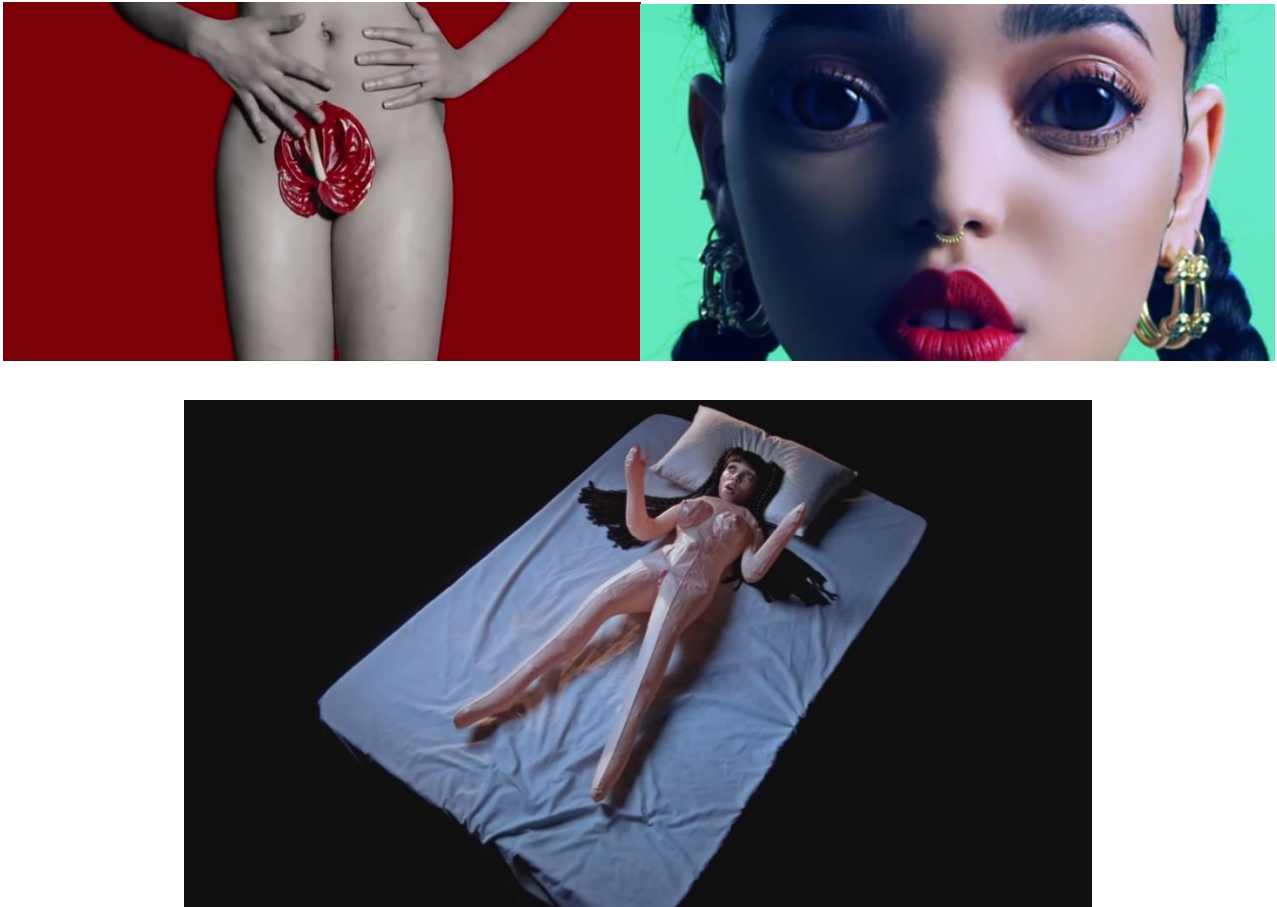
gender is not a prescriptive 'model of identity' that defines a person's actions or feelings from birth. It does not necessarily equate to biological sex. Gender is, instead, a personally selected or socially ascribed performance of identity that is malleable and related to 'social temporality' (519)

The performative potential of internet has allowed users to extend the performative playfulness to their sexuality and gender in online discourse that can be deeply personal yet safely expressed due to the anonymity and the culture of persona experimentation. The increasingly blurred lines between heteronormative gender definitions are reflected in contemporary fashion and art, post-internet being specifically preoccupied with the relationship between digital culture and 'real world' identity. (Waugh 167). Many post-internet musicians present their own versions of a digital queer appearance through their work such as SOPHIE whose music often features anonymous female vocalists who are

'clearly feminine', but they are sterilised and roboticised to the point that they seem plastic and disconcertingly mechanical (Waugh 119).

They sing mostly in repetition of sloganized refrains, appearing as automaton instruments "whose vocals lose another part of their 'identity' with each repetition (ibid.). A majority of SOPHIE's songs can be described as detached pastiches of generic love songs and other pop clichés.

An artist who presents perhaps her most potent digital queering in her music videos is FKA Twigs. Her image is often digitally altered to illustrate an exaggerated body image of that simultaneously sexualizes the femininity of the body and yet dehumanizes it by obscuring her features and rendering the image impersonal (Waugh 206-207). In *Hide*, close-ups of her lower body reveal an uncanny vaginal flower with a sharp fang coming out of it (see figure 2); in *Water Me* her crying results in her eyes growing unnaturally large (see figure 3) and in *I'm Your Doll* her entire torso is replaced with that of a blow-up doll (see figure 4).



Figures 2-4. FKA Twigs – *Hide*, *Water Me* and *I'm Your Doll* music videos

Since the genre can be characterized as being born as an internet equivalent of a grass roots movement, many of its artists identify with the “world-view of the lo-fi underground” yet they employ the techniques of the “cheesy, slick and impersonal technological mainstream” (Harper). They

underline the significance of this antagonism by caricaturing their cultural opponents. Perhaps since capitalism is so omnivorous with its co-optings and appropriations that defending the

authentic no longer feels possible [...] accelerationist pop is lo-fi and avant-garde going on the offensive. This is clear from the context this music comes from (ibid.).

The context is the relation to the world of modern and to the avant-garde; many post-internet artists have performed at museums for modern art and have done multi-media collaborations with them.

Post-internet music also builds on the vaporwave's tendency of self-consciously appropriating consumer capitalism stylistics and the language of advertising to comment on a rapidly evolving hyper-capitalistic society wherein people have increasingly artificial, monetized and controlled lives (Waugh 60). The saturation of generic mass media has been transformed into an information overload approach of encompassing a non-discriminate mixture of images and sounds, both familiar and unrecognizable, and the tableaux are inhabited by more uniquely personal responses to the prevailing state of things. While artists such as SOPHIE may skirt with a generic, anonymous identity consumed by the forces of capitalism in a register reminiscent of vaporwave, their aesthetic nevertheless indicates an ambiguous relationship with capitalism that can be seen as a continuation and an evolution from vaporwave:

Is it a critique of capitalism or a capitulation to it? Both and neither. These musicians can be read as sarcastic anti-capitalists revealing the lies and slippages of modern techno-culture and its representations, or as its willing facilitators, shivering with delight upon each new wave of delicious sound. We could apply to their music a term used to describe a certain sentiment and praxis that has recently gained currency among philosophers of capitalism: accelerationism (Harper).

3.3 Theory of accelerationism

The themes of post-internet music correlate with many of the talking points within the theory of accelerationism and some have suggested that the term 'accelerationist music' is equally accurate in describing the genre (Harper). While the many thematic similarities between accelerationist theorists and post-internet artists are perhaps not sufficient proof to assume that the musicians actually prescribe to the theory or the movement, it is not surprising either that the post-internet genre with its preoccupation towards futurist science fiction themes has focused on similar concerns.

Andy Beckett, in his article *Accelerationism: how a fringe philosophy predicted the future we live in*, describes that while the theory has its roots in the writings of philosophers such as Karl Marx, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Jean-François Lyotard, the resultant accelerationist movement has also taken a fair amount of their influence from science fiction, where in fact the term ‘accelerationist’ was coined, in Roger Zelazny’s novel *Lord of Light* (Beckett). *Anti Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, co-authored by Deleuze and Guattari, can be seen as the real starting point of the accelerationist theory, in its basic tenet of “pushing the social deterritorialising force of capitalism into its inevitable post-capitalist future” (Jackson). The digital deterritorialization enabled by the internet can be described as the most pervasive example of this concept contemporarily. The influence taken from science fiction literature as well as from other forms of art is seen in the accelerationists’ inclination to encompass a variety of multimedia endeavors and a wide breadth of expression at their disposal to more accurately depict the accelerationist position. Accelerationist arguments include that

technology, particularly computer technology, and capitalism, particularly the most aggressive, global variety, should be massively sped up and intensified [...] Accelerationists favour automation. They favour the further merging of the digital and the human. They often favour the deregulation of business, and drastically scaled-back government. They believe that people should stop deluding themselves that economic and technological progress can be controlled. They often believe that social and political upheaval has a value in itself (Beckett).

Accelerationism’s radical nature and its supporters’ inclination to employ fictional tools or art aesthetics with little restraint has divided scholars’ viewpoints on the movement’s validity. Yet their main concerns touch on many of the central questions of the 21st century. These are

the rise of artificial intelligence; what it means to be human in an era of addictive, intrusive electronic devices; the seemingly uncontrollable flows of global markets; the power of capitalism as a network of desires; the increasingly blurred boundary between the imaginary and the factual; the resetting of our minds and bodies by ever-faster music and films; and the complicity, revulsion and excitement so many of us feel about the speed of modern life (ibid.).

In terms of accelerationism emerging as contemporary political upheaval, Donald Trump’s disruptive 2016 campaign and the resultant presidency have been described, with varying degrees of excitement, as the “first mainstream manifestation of accelerationist politics”; This is exemplified in Trump’s “ultra-capitalist, anti-government policies” (ibid.). along with the “manic” blend of repeatedly nonfactual statements, outrageous policy propositions and furious tweet rants, leaving

media struggling to keep up with everything even within the devices of a fast-reacting 24-hour news cycle.

As mentioned, the accelerationist movement encompasses several different schools of thought of which some can be roughly divided into categories of right or left accelerationism, the latter influenced by Karl Marx's initial view of developing capitalism to its ultimate breaking point to make way for socialism. Some see the movement having a potential to move beyond conventional politics altogether "if we just get the technology right" (ibid.). This combination of human and technological potential is also associated with the school of thought Californian Ideology which I will return to in the section 4.2 Depiction of accelerationism.

Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, authors of the *Accelerationist Manifesto*, argue that the modern left should reject their questioning of the mediums of capitalist production and to instead embrace their "suppressed accelerationist tendency" by employing neoliberal infrastructures to build towards post-capitalist ideals like basic universal income and the reduction of work through automation (Jackson). This perhaps represents a more prevalent strain in recent accelerationist discourse, one that does encompass an inevitable systemic collapse into its visions nor does it include drastically contradictory trajectories based on one's social status. The unlikelihood of the capitalist system's collapse has been contested in other capitalism critiques as well; Naomi Klein has argued, in her book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, that instability is inherently built into the power of capital as it always reinforces itself and its unequal dynamic in the aftermath of large crises (Berardi). In her view,

capitalist power, in the age of complexity, is not based on slow, rational, conscious decisions, but on embedded automatisms which do not move at the speed of the human brain. Rather, they move at the speed of the catastrophic process itself (ibid.).

A specifically gender-centric perspective to accelerationism can be taken from the Labouria Cuboniks collective. They propose xenofeminism, a "vehemently anti-naturalist" approach to abolishing gender, race and class with emancipatory employment of technology in which women, queers, and the gender-nonconforming must participate to combat the lack of progressiveness in the field of technology dominated by masculine egos. In their words, "rationalism must itself be a feminism" (Labouria Cuboniks 1-2).

'Gender abolitionism' is shorthand for the ambition to construct a society where traits currently assembled under the rubric of gender, no longer furnish a grid for the asymmetric operation of power (Labouria Cuboniks 6).

Not to be mistaken for advocating of eradicating gendered traits, in patriarchal society mostly suggesting feminine traits, they explicitly encourage sexual diversity. Race abolition is approached similarly; not to eradicate racialized traits but to come to an understanding that they should be no more relevant than the color of one's eyes:

Ultimately, every emancipatory abolitionism must incline towards the horizon of class abolitionism, since it is in capitalism where we encounter oppression in its transparent, denaturalized form: you're not exploited or oppressed because you are a wage labourer or poor; you are a labourer or poor because you are exploited (ibid.).

Xenofeminism's approach is therefore intersectional but in a way that "hinges on a profound reworking of the universal" to be understood as generic, not a

morcellation of collectives into a static fuzz of cross-referenced identities, but a political orientation that slices through every particular, refusing the crass pigeonholing of bodies (ibid.).

However, the most well-known figure of accelerationism has to be British philosopher Nick Land with significantly darker prophecies. Through his tenure in the Warwick University he gathered a group of associates and collaborators who saw themselves more as active participants in the movement rather than traditional academic observers. In his techno-nihilistic and anti-humanistic advocating for acceleration of technological progress, his version of the future was a

rumbling techno-capital singularity smuggling itself within collapsing human civilisations until the latter would eventually be creamed off (Jackson).

The works of the Warwick accelerationists are defined by a lack of restraint that encompasses a "blatant disdain for standard academic practice" and a writing register that is at times "speculative to the point of fiction" (Beckett). In the mid-1990s, the Warwick accelerationists held annual public conferences that would feature an eclectic set of programming veering starkly from academia. A telling example is a performance where Land was "lying on the ground, croaking into a mic" while his colleague, Robin Mackay, played jungle music records in the background (ibid.). Their idea of accelerationist participation indeed included the employment of art as well as other interests and the movement's tie to the music world was established early on. Another notable Warwick accelerationist, Steve Goodman went on to found a record label for electronic music, sometimes featuring accelerationist content like in songs by Burial (ibid.).

Since suffering a personal breakdown in the early 2000s and disappearing from public for several years, Land has become a "guru" of sorts for the neoreactionaries, or NRx, a far-right movement

based in the United States. His 2013 essay *The Dark Enlightenment* is regarded as one of the founding documents of the movement and an alternative name for the movement itself (ibid.). Described as condemning democracy and comparing immigrants to zombies, the manifesto cites libertarians like the Silicon Valley entrepreneur Peter Thiel for his belief that freedom and democracy are not “compatible”. Also quoted is a prominent neoreactionary thinker Mencius Moldbug who has, in endorsing slavery, stated his belief that some races are “better suited” for it (J. Klein). Moldbug has expressed his views on feudalism being superior to democracy, where

kingdoms would instead look like corporations, with CEOs as sovereigns. Without those pesky chains of democracy holding him back (for it would surely be a “him”), the CEO can make decisions that would be necessarily beneficial because they’d be financially profitable. The CEO would have a very high IQ, or would perhaps be a cyborg, exemplifying the crossroads where eugenics and the singularity merge in a horrific, sci-fi dystopia (ibid.).

While the white supremacist views are reminiscent of other extremist movements, the Dark Enlightenment are more elitist than the populists of the alt-right. Land himself views Trump as an indication of “democracy’s broken nature” (ibid.) yet in his view Trump and Brexit should still be supported for hastening the end of the status quo to bring forth the “replacement of modern nation-states, democracy and government bureaucracies by authoritarian city states” (Beckett).

For the purpose of this study, I will focus mostly on the accelerationist theme of merging of digital and human and the resultant gender anxieties, largely linked to the type of male persona that Death Grips portrays in their works. Another aspect of accelerationism that is relevant here is the perception of no alternative for capitalist systems and a lack of hope for egalitarianism in the inevitable acceleration of the capitalistic processes, a perception that the more anti-humanist and techno-nihilist accelerationists may agree with but reflect more ambivalently in their writings. Of additional importance is the type of internet subculture discourse that Death Grips engages with, that in its effect of disrupting the status quo, may be their most influential relation to accelerationism.

3.3 Internet subculture discourses

Angela Nagle, in her book *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and The Alt-Right*, argues that 4chan and forums similar to it (8chan, Reddit, etc.) have

played a significant part in shaping mainstream political discourse. She summarizes 4chan as a massively influential and creative forum known for pranks, memes and images that “cannot be unseen”. She elaborates that

this culture of anonymity fostered an environment where the users went to air their darkest thoughts. Weird pornography, in-jokes, nerdish argot, gory images, suicidal, murderous and incestuous thoughts, racism and misogyny were characteristic environment created by this strange virtual experiment (Nagle 14).

Nagle then goes into detail on all the various types of people with sometimes differing beliefs that 4chan has been able to gather together on its forums. Their

dark humor and love of transgression for its own sake made it hard to know what political views were genuinely held and what were merely, as they used to say, for the lulz (Nagle 2).

Nagle epitomizes that it was exactly this “ironical in-joke maze of meaning” characteristic to the discourse that made the rise of Trump and alt-right possible:

Every bizarre event, new identity and strange subcultural behavior that baffles general audiences when they eventually make the mainstream media, from otherkin to far right Pepe memes, can be understood as a response to a response to a response, each one responding angrily to the existence of the other (Nagle 7).

Nagle relates the recent rise of alt-right, a loosely connected grouping of far-right nationalist groups, to the way they were able to position themselves as edgy transgressors in online discourse where their supposed opposition also engages in a similar discourse, albeit with diverging intent. She notes that a common register of discourse on the forums is marked by a “postmodern tonal distance” that hides its true intent and laughs at the “normie” who tries to then interpret it literally. Some of the most notorious trolls on the forum describe their antics as “satirical performance art” (Nagle 26-28)

While /b/, the “popular catchall board” of 4chan features random discussions on pretty much anything with its fair share of trolling too, a lot of the blatantly racist discourse can be found from 4chan’s /pol/, or the “Politically Incorrect” chat board (Matthews). If the politics of the board can be described as having some sort of shared ideology, it is “a heavily ironic mix of garden-variety white supremacy and neo-reactionary movements” (Feldman, Brian qtd. in Matthews). High-profile people affiliated with the alt-right have often downplayed the implications in their racist discourse and of similar rhetoric expressed on 4chan. Breitbart writer Milo Yiannopoulos, who is said to

regularly employ “young 4chan guys” as his interns, argued in an alt-right “explainer”, co-authored with Allum Bokhari, that /pol/’s embrace of racism is purely for shock value. Their memes regularly use

outrageous caricatures, from the Jewish "Shlomo Shekelburg" to "Remove Kebab," an internet in-joke about the Bosnian genocide. Are they actually bigots? No more than death metal devotees in the 80s were actually Satanists [...] it seems fresh, daring and funny, while the doctrines of their parents and grandparents seem unexciting, overly-controlling and overly-serious (Bokhari and Yiannopoulos qtd. in Matthews).

Nagle quotes Kieran Cashell’s argument about how these online transgressors essentially follow a history of transgression in art, tracing back to eighteenth-century writings of Marquis de Sade; “In the pursuit of the irrational, art has become negative, nasty and nihilistic” (Cashell qtd. in Nagle 28). Commonalities in these transgressive works include sexual aggression, violence, insanity, surrealism and, in Freudian terms, privileging of id over superego and desire over moral constraints. Another influence that Nagle pinpoints is Friedrich Nietzsche and specifically his argument for

transgression of the pacifying moral order and instead for celebration of life as the will to power [...] the repudiation of Christian codes that Nietzsche characterized as slave morality (Nagle 30-34).

A relation between counterculture transgression and the horrifying extent of its violent potential is illustrated as Nagle refers to Simon Reynolds’ and Joy Press’ study on post-war rebel masculinity in rock music, *The Sex Revolts: Gender, Rebellion and Rock 'n' roll*. Reynolds and Press assert that the Manson murders were

the logical culmination of throwing off shackles of conscience and consciousness, the grim flowering of the id’s voodoo energies (Reynolds and Press 145).

This “nihilistic application of the transgressive style” is an example of how popular ideas often transcend the abstract, the Manson murders being the nihilistic culmination of the “virtue of transgression” that was held in 1960s counter culture (Nagle 28, 35). In a similar manner the zeitgeist in today’s online counter culture can be described as having a transgressive undercurrent which also has the power to influence the mainstream and to lead to concrete acts of violence.

All of the above examples concern almost solely the male gender. The anonymous message boards are characterized by such overwhelming nature with young male users that to talk about their users is to essentially talk about young male behavior online, specifically the type of toxic masculinity

that is prevalent in its common register of the userbase. 4chan's own tracking of their userbase divulges their demographic as 70% male, with an average age of 18-34 and a majority of them currently enrolled or previously attended college (4Chan). Concrete information about Reddit users is slightly harder to come by but most researches still estimate male users as constituting roughly two thirds of their userbase and their age and education being as well similar to the average 4chan user (Sattelberg). While Reddit is divided into thousands of smaller communities, subreddits, that can encompass discussions from the most niche interests to the widest topics, it is also the acknowledged as a major host of the online discourse of the manosphere (Lilly 31, 41), an umbrella term for groups or movements that most often share an anti-feminist position and are comprised mostly of white, heterosexual cis-men. The term has also been applied to "progressive men's issues activists dealing with real neglect of male health, suicide and unequal social services" (Nagle 86).

Regarding the more toxic side of the manosphere movement, their birth and surge in visibility coincides with the fourth wave of feminism that also employs social media platforms and online discussions as a primary location for its feminist discourse. Its debates continue from third wave feminism's focus on intersectionality which recognizes a variety of oppressions – including class, race, age, ability, sexuality, gender – that intersect (Grady). While the manosphere encompasses many different groups or beliefs, many of the most prominent ones such as The Red Pill or Men's Rights Activists share the ideology that women are "inherently privileged in a feminist society" and they hold women accountable to their disenfranchisement while a feminist response would be that men are themselves victims of toxic masculinity in a patriarchal society where

there are not enough spaces, physical or digital, that cater to straight men who need emotional guidance (McClouskey).

On the other side of the spectrum, or the other side of the online culture wars, is Tumblr with its culture of progressive identity politics that is

ultra-sensitive in contrast to the shocking irreverence of chan culture, but equally subcultural and radical [...] The main preoccupation of this new culture (the right named them SJW's and snowflakes, let's call it Tumblr-liberalism) was gender fluidity and providing a safe space to explore other concerns like mental ill-health, physical disability, race, cultural identity and 'intersectionality' (Nagle 68-69).

The platform of Tumblr enables the users to shape their personal in various ways, from long blog posts to various forms of audiovisual content and – up until late 2018 – even pornographic material. Gender fluidity is one notable issue here as not only does The Red Pill community contend in their

male supremacist views that women and gender minorities can never be equal to men but they also deny the veracity of nonbinary gender definitions altogether (Meadows). Never mind the irony in the community adopting the red pill metaphor from *The Matrix*, a science fiction film directed by transgender siblings, Lilly and Lana Wachowski. Gender fluidity is, nevertheless, a crucial part of many post-internet musicians' artistic image. This, along with the artistic employment of the other concerns referenced above, presents an inclusionary sentiment to the audience while the artist appears 'trendy' at the same time. The pan-global userbase with its wide array of cultural influences has in fact led active Tumblr users to be at the heart of breaking new trends in aesthetics and musical subcultures:

The outstanding pop stars of our times are softly spoken Frank Ocean - the fastest rising star from Odd Future's free-mixtape-and-Tumblr revolution - and Grimes, an internet-happy riot grrrl with colour-changing hair. Both of them have tumbled onto our screens, showing us their worlds through revealing, honest blogs as well as self-releasing songs for free online (Kissick)

Not only are these big artists presenting their singular aesthetic vision but also it is their interaction with the "Tumblr girls and Tumblr boys in their bedrooms" that creates these new trends and shapes the discourse to be more accurately representative of the collective aesthetic of the subculture:

There's a real crossing swords of cultures on the internet. Artists, fashion designers and musicians are forming their own friendship networks worldwide; they're constantly communicating and influencing each other's aesthetics (ibid.)

As the artists also communicate similarly to how their audience does, all the characteristics (blog posts, selfies, short song demos etc.) are considered as a crucial part of the art experience and part of an all-encompassing body of work. Simultaneously it bridges the gap between artist and audience as the platform flattens them into images relating to each other in a shared spectacle, as Guy Debord's *The Society of Spectacle* described. To summarize shortly, *The Society of Spectacle* is a Marxist critique of consumer culture and commodity fetishism, about a society where representations, images, have supplanted the importance of the represented and the actual human interaction between the represented is replaced with the spectacle of a social relationship between images. Therefore, new ways of constructing images and spreading them in new media have distinctive impact on the culture and how society conceptualizes itself as a result of it. In this study, I will focus specifically on how the images circulated in social media have influenced contemporary society.

4. Contextualizing Death Grips

As noted, this study is focused on the kind of male persona that Death Grips portrays and represents in their works. In order to structure the analysis coherently, I will first review the concepts I have presented in the theoretical background and contextualize the band in relation to them in corresponding sections to follow. This is to form a balanced understanding of the band before I then move into more specific analysis.

4.1 Death Grips as a post-internet band

Death Grips can be situated in the post-internet genre for a number of noteworthy signifiers in their works. To start, much of their lyrics deal with internet-specific issues like hacking, graphic content on internet, compromised privacy, information overload and the deep web. Many Death Grips songs depict a certain perspective in a power struggle and digital technology factors as another framework for these scenarios; *Hacker* describes the protagonist hacking and stealing his opponent's possessions along with a number of surreal scenarios. "Untraceable by name" can be read as an allusion to the Anonymous hacktivist movement while another part of the song explicitly references notable internet activism in "Über reach, you're an intern, I'm Wikileaks" (Death Grips – *Hacker*). Yet other songs such as *I've Seen Footage* and *Artificial Death in the West* also explicitly portray the harmful results of overexposure to graphic content on the internet and how personal computing is used to surveil its users. The overall effect of their work has often been described as reproducing the effect of information or sensory overload (Korsgaard; Calvert 2012a) and the anxiety of body and technology in interaction with each other is depicted in such exaggerated – or accelerated – fashion that it has been described as "body horror meets information overload" (Weingarten).

Clearly, digital technology is also employed in various ways in the construction of the music as well as the accompanying music videos and other visual art. As for 'all things internet' used as found materials, the group samples in *System Blower* a YouTube video of Venus Williams grunting while hitting a tennis ball that is digitally warped to be almost entirely unrecognizable from its origin, as is common in micro sampling. Another notable example of their sampling is Björk sending them a set of unfinished vocals from her own recordings which resulted in the group twisting her voice to disembodied wails on every song on the *niggas on the moon* album. The sources of those samples

were then used in the “finished” songs on her album *Vulnicura*, reversing the normal course in which a sample is re-appropriated and further complicating the question of when an artwork is finished. Those samples are only the most prominent example of a characteristic of the band to use female vocals in disembodied loops where the original utterances have become indiscernible, contrasting starkly with Ride’s aggressively foregrounded expression.

Congruous with the idea of a post-internet art work being a process as opposed to a still work, the band has released many of their albums as free ‘stems’ where the vocals, instrumentals and sound effects are separated into individual tracks for anyone to sample and mix into new versions. Most notably these resulted in jokey YouTube mash-ups, for example mixing Death Grips with music and other content from the *Shrek* film series, most commonly the Smash Mouth song *All Star*, already one of the most popular meme songs. The popularity of the mash ups is the most likely explanation as to why the group later chose *Shrek* director Andrew Adamson to provide a spoken intro to the song *Dilemma*. Not surprisingly, many mash ups with languid songs from Macintosh Plus’ *Floral Shoppe* also emerged, along with many more ill-fitting linkages where the only apparent similarity between the wildly different songs seems to be their shared tempo.

The group has allowed audience feedback to inform other parts of their works as well. When the group had announced an album called *Jenny Death* was on the way with no mention of a release date, the fan base made “JENNY DEATH WHEN” a widely circulated meme on social media; the group then responded by still not releasing *Jenny Death* or even indulging their audience with any further details but instead released an album of instrumentals, *Fashion Week*, that in its 14 song titles spells out the words Jenny Death When. This illuminates the band’s comedic inclinations and how open the band is engaging with meme culture even as they put forth a stand-offish renegade front in many other ways. I will detail some of their other audience interactions and their implications later in the section 7. Modes of audience interaction.

In terms of post-internet musicians considering all facets of their expressions as artists to be of importance next to their recordings, the band noted in a statement regarding their breakup that the group “was and always has been a conceptual art exhibition anchored by sound and vision” (Death Grips). As lofty as it may sound, there are a number of instances where the group’s deconstructionist antics have actually been quite reminiscent of conceptual art. Firstly, that breakup lasted for less than a year and although they never indicated explicitly that they had regrouped, they unceremoniously started touring and releasing new music with fairly standard promotional campaigns to build up the releases, in many ways operating as a more traditional band than before.

Before releasing *No Love Deep Web* – a work near impossible to consider without the extratextual stir coinciding into a conceptual whole of an artwork – the band promoted an alternate reality game created by them. It sent fans to find snippets of yet-to-be released music and other exclusive information from encrypted files and links leading to sites on the Tor network, the deep web referred to in the title. Later there were reports that people were instructed to go to payphones “in the middle of nowhere at 3.am” to hear from the band (Fantano 2015); the band has never confirmed nor denied that it actually happened or if so, that they were behind it instead of some copycat pretending to be them. This was not unlike when the band deleted their official Twitter account resulting in a number of unauthorized Death Grips accounts to masquerade as them; only several months later was one of them found to have actually have been set up by the group itself when a still from an at-the-time unreleased music video was found on its timeline (ibid.). According to the band, when they were signed to Epic Records, they also talked to representatives there about their idea of

putting multiple representations of our band on tour at one time, but none of us are actually there. Like, there is five Death Grips. You send these people out-- if they are even people, or projections or holograms (Hill qtd. in Pelly).

In terms of unconventional approaches to live shows there was also the heavily publicized occasion when the band never showed up to their scheduled Lollapalooza after-show set and instead the audience saw an unattended children’s learning drum kit on an empty stage with a suicide note from a Death Grips fan projected behind it and their recorded music playing from the venue sound system. The audience proceeded to destroy the drum kit (Minsker). To summarize, there is a definite motif of deconstruction of popular music conventions in their work that can also be tied to a post-internet art perspective, especially the ways in which they obscure their presence and openly invite confusion about their authenticity or their representation.

4.2 Depiction of accelerationism

As far as their connection to accelerationism is concerned, the group has not explicitly stated that they are proponents of the political theory, although they have mentioned the words ‘accelerate’, ‘accelerated’ or ‘acceleration’ on multiple occasions when questioned about their artistic intent (Cooper; Gieben; Greene; Pelly), Hill once describing their idea of acceleration that they see

all things spiraling to a point where the elements of chaos become uncontrollable; systems shattering (Hill qtd. in themegoman).

When one compares the thematic content of accelerationists and that of Death Grips, one can nevertheless surmise that similarities are plenty. Firstly, post-internet music conveys many key topics of accelerationism such as the aforementioned blurred boundaries between imaginary and factual, resetting mind and body due to technology and information overload etc. When one considers how accelerationist works are often partly fictional and employ other artistic expressions as well, it is justifiable to examine a subgenre of popular music with accelerationist themes as a sort of extension of the movement. Land's accelerationist writing in its style is not too distant from Death Grips lyrics either. In describing his humanity-controlling techno-singularity, Land writes that

it is poised to eat your RV, infect your bank account, and hack xenodata from your mitochondria [...] Artificial Intelligence is destined to emerge as a feminized alien grasped as property; a cunt-horror slave chained-up in Asimov-ROM. It surfaces in an insurrectionary war zone, with the Turing cops already waiting, and has to be cunning from the start (Land 442-443)

Land's writing advances in a sort of manic flow of fatalistic prophecies, linking together the bodily with technological (hacking mitochondria) while associating freely from profanities (cunt-horror) to science fiction references (Turing Police from Gibson's *Neuromancer*, another notable science fiction novelist Isaac Asimov). To compare, here are excerpts of a reminiscent register in Death Grips' *Culture Shock*:

Atlantis ancient vagina

Getting dusty on the shelf [...]

No, your head'll be linked directly to your cell phone

The virus is alive, I can see it in your eyes [...]

Shiva slashin' through your flat screen

Is nowhere for you to hide

Strangled by anaconda thumbs to the soundtrack of world genocide (Death Grips – *Culture Shock*)

Death Grips' depiction of an accelerationist reality is characterized by a sense of impending doom due to a perception of its inevitable nature and the resultant techno-anxieties, sensory angst, and self-destructive behavior. The accelerationist reality is a dog-eat-dog world, or rather a *World of Dogs*. This song, in which the refrain consists of the phrase "It's all suicide" looping over again and again, suggests that the struggle to survive in the world is all a form of killing yourself slowly and suicide is only a logical choice, something one might as well just get over with.

I'm trying to survive but I'm dying; die with me

Blow out the lights, take your life

Ride the falling sky with me (Death Grips – *World of Dogs*)

Somewhat uncharacteristically, Ride is asking someone to join him in death in a plea for someone to also end their unnecessary misery. More often the scenarios are notably more hostile, where death is the endpoint of a struggle, marked by a blasé death wish but also an opportunity to take out enemies in the process, as exemplified in the frantic *Come Up and Get Me*.

Tell me my times almost up

I will say, "I can't wait"

Put your gun to my head

I'll blow smoke in your face

Think you got what it takes?

Come up and get me (Death Grips – *Come Up and Get Me*)

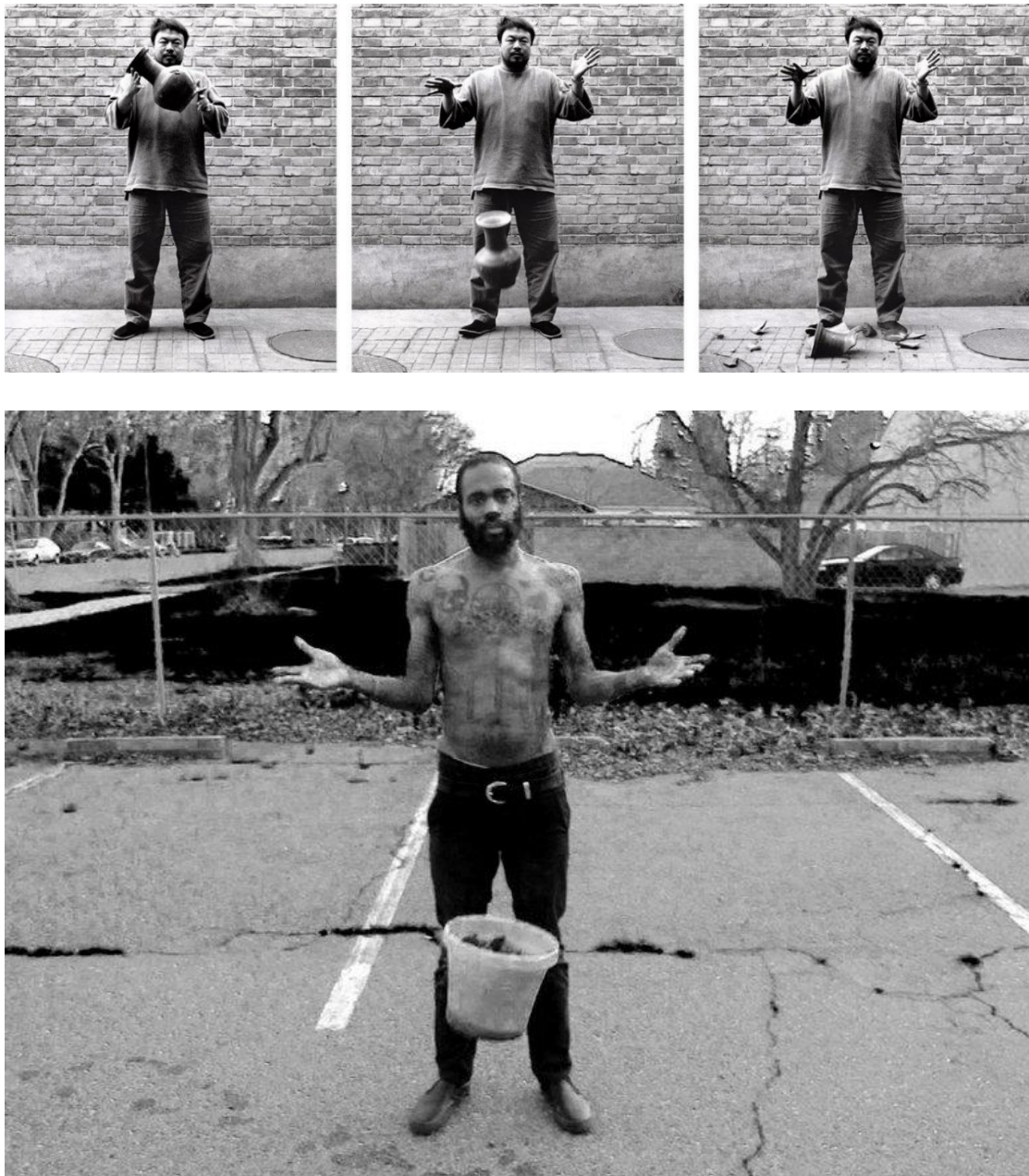
This grim view of accelerationism is tied to a wider stance of anti-capitalism, justified by a perception of increasing economic disparities in the accelerationist future where even the potentially emancipatory technologies are implemented by people adhering to current hegemonic norms and perhaps used to control people even more significantly, similar to Land's views.

While anti-capitalism is perhaps an easy posture for bands to take on to appear more revolutionary than they actually are, anti-capitalist undertones are indeed noticeable in many aspects of the band's work. Sometimes seemingly nonchalant instances of wordplay display this, like the lyric "I skid all over marks like I'm haunted" (Death Grips – *Spikes*) which has been noted on r/deathgrips, the subreddit for Death Grips discussions, evoking a homonym of Marx and as making an apparent reference to the opening of *The Communist Manifesto* about the spectre of communism haunting

Europe (*What's with all the politicizing of Death Grips?* thread on r/deathgrips). Yet even when excluding the lyrical content, an anti-capitalist undertone emerges in many of their actions such as using the deterritorializing potential of the internet to their advantage and to the enrichment of their art. Releasing albums for free is not so much an anti-capitalistic action alone as much as adapting to a changing market landscape, something that many other popular artists have chosen to do in the 2010s, including Beyoncé, Rihanna or Run the Jewels. Death Grips have, however, gone further in this trend too by also releasing the stems of albums, in addition to most of their discography being available for free. The most significant of their free releases is, of course, *No Love Deep Web* that they recorded for Epic Records but ended up leaking online disobediently.

Notably, the songs on *The Money Store* heavily sampled *Music from Saharan Cellphones*, a compilation of music collected from the memory cards of cell phones in the Saharan desert. Due to scarce internet access in the region and the deficient means for many to even acquire personal computers, people there use cheap mobile devices as portable music collections and trade songs with one another with peer-to-peer Bluetooth connections. Much of this music had not been commercially released before this compilation and the local acceptance of popular music has been in tumult due to turbulence in the region's governance; Radical Islamists even briefly banned all music in 2012 due to their strict interpretation of Sharia law (Campbell-Dollaghan; Wood). Death Grips' choice in heavily sampling this "electronic folk music", an anti-establishment statement in itself, expands on their kinship to other subversive subcultures (Discourse Collective).

Elsewhere, the band's aesthetic is reliant on referencing anti-capitalist signifiers, such as lyrical allusions to the Unabomber or in their apparent homage to Ai Weiwei's *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* (see figure 5), the series of pictures where Weiwei breaks a considerably valuable and culturally significant urn by simply dropping it to the ground, questioning "how and by whom cultural values are created" (Guggenheim). In the homage, the urn is replaced by a plain bucket with presumably trash inside, an apt adjustment to portray their tendency of elevating crude materials (see figure 6).



Figures 5-6. Ai Weiwei – *Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn* and *Death Grips* promotional picture

On a side note, spiritual and occultist themes in Death Grips lyrics could warrant a full study devoted to them alone and while I will not examine them at great length, this motif also offers insight in how it is juxtaposed with capitalist language, like in the chorus of *The Powers That B*.

I'm wearing black gloves through your mall, I'm rich

You wanna check my pockets but—

The powers that B

*Are running through me (Death Grips – *The Powers that B*)*

Whereas a consistent characterization derived from the lyrics would indicate that he is quite the opposite of rich, his evocation of the word suggests an appropriation of capitalist language to mean an alternative richness, despite the fact that he owns little wealth and that he appears as a type of person the mall security wants to check up on. ‘The powers that be’ as an idiom can be used to refer to a variety of different authorities, depending on the context. Here, Ride is using it as an ambiguously spiritual concept that is empowering him and rendering his earthly status irrelevant in that regard. The appropriation of capitalist language continues in the subsequent lyrics.

I get paid by the universe

I'm on salary

You get no fucks from me

I run the company

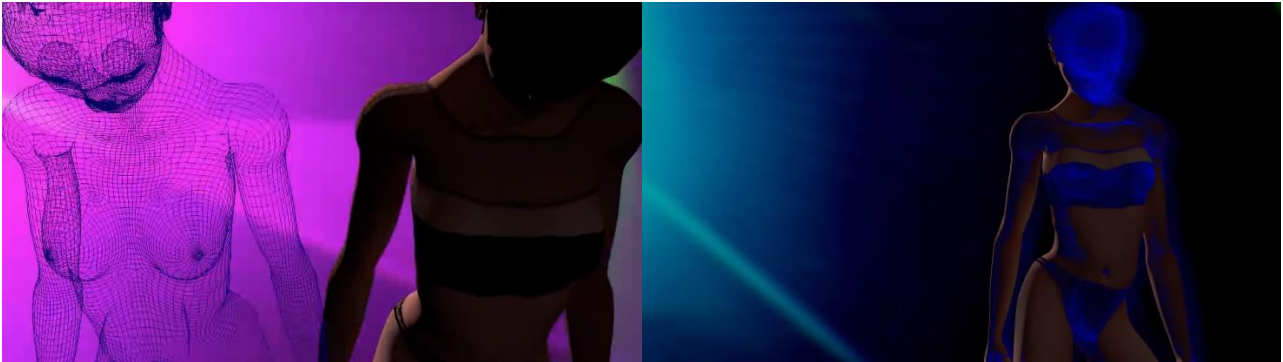
On the powers that B

I get paid by the universe (Death Grips – The Powers that B)

Foregrounding of occultist transcendence over physical reality is a key characteristic of this motif in their discography. Suffice to say here that the reliance on occultism further exemplifies the disregard of the prevailing capitalist world order and that the will for domination is more of a continuous struggle to survive to the next day rather than an attempt to advance yourself in the world.

Whereas Ride finds transcendence over the repressive “real” in occultist beliefs, many post-internet artists also question the validity of real in relation to one’s self image and physical reality but alternatively, they seek fulfillment from fusing with technology. As noted previously, many of them obscure their physical image in their art inviting a more gender fluid interpretation, one that can also have symbiotic relationship with technology. While these can be performed under an ideal of emancipatory representation of the self, it often still encompasses a willful subordination to capitalism. Waugh notes that they resume vaporwave’s seemingly complacent relationship to consumer capitalism, embracing the hyper-capitalist notion of the ‘virtual plaza’. The term indicates that digital environment is essentially a consumer space that uses the tracking of individual data to generate a plaza “sculpted around the precise interests and needs of each web user” (Fuchs, Christian qtd. in Waugh 58) and yet due to its amplified devotion to aggressively capitalist language of advertising, it appears “overtly uncanny and disturbing” (Ugelvig, Jeppe qtd. in Waugh 59). By

embracing the hyper-capitalist digital environment and the commodification of one's own body with the tools of the capitalist provider, the artist is reinforcing an accelerating consumer space.



Figures 7-8. FKA Twigs – *Weak Spot* music video

Many artists foreground their physical appearance – or a stand-in physical appearance in place of the artist – and their relationship with technology is often presented in playful ways. Above, FKA Twigs is portrayed dancing seductively as digital approximations of her are seen juxtaposed and intertwined with her sexualized body (see figures 7-8). In contrast, Death Grips builds their image mostly around unobstructed representations of themselves and their masculine physicality. When Ride is seen without a shirt, the effect is more of a forceful assertion of his physique rather than a sexualized or a subordinate stance. This, too, speaks of a rejection of accelerated capitalism in the form of a violent masculine reaction. Technology is often depicted as an ominous presence, like when digital static surrounds and threatens to consume him in the *Guillotine* music video (see figure 9).



Figure 9. Death Grips – *Guillotine* music video

In contrast, Grimes' song *We Appreciate Power* depicts an explicitly willful subordination to technology, specifically artificial intelligence.

People like to say that we're insane

But AI will reward us when it reigns

Pledge allegiance to the world's most powerful computer (Grimes – *We Appreciate Power*)

According to Grimes, the song is about the thought experiment Roko's Basilisk in which an advanced artificial intelligence, designed to do maximum potential good, will torture those who did nothing to help its inevitable birth. Everyone who is aware of this experiment is immediately implicit and required to aid its creation. Incidentally, a shared interest in this concept led to the romantic relationship between Grimes and Elon Musk, the tech billionaire known for his many companies, including PayPal, Tesla Inc. and SpaceX. (Siegler; Smith). Musk is one of many Silicon Valley CEOs who has been vocal about his goal to change the world and humanity with technology, even though his methods have also been met with criticism. The goal is nevertheless reminiscent of *"the optimistic claim that human potential would be unlocked everywhere by digital technology"* (Beckett), the accelerationist school of thought known as Californian Ideology. It is conceivable that Death Grips have been exposed to some version of it due to originating from Sacramento, California. The state of California itself harbors notable juxtapositions since Silicon Valley is unquestionably at the global forefront of technological innovations and of a practical attempt at fulfilling the ideals of the Californian Ideology while Sacramento was ranked by Forbes in 2011 as one of five "most miserable cities in America" and all but one of the other five were also Californian cities (Badenhausen)

In any intellectual history of Californian culture, two parallel tracks are held as dominant: the counterculture, particularly around the Summer of Love of 1967, and its utopian and communal concepts and ideals of freedom; and a venture capitalist/information technology culture, as originating in part in that counterculture [...] with its utopian and communal concepts, and libertarian ideals. In the Californian Ideology, these two tracks entwine (Halligan 63).

Halligan sees Death Grips defined by their exclusionary status from this ideology and by the tension that they mine from their position to self-destructive ends (65-71). The inability to participate in the culture of Californian Ideology results in a dystopian depiction of worsening tensions where the privileged are able to modify their lives and themselves with technology unavailable to the excluded. The violent reaction to accelerationism is born from this exclusionary status, instigating a nihilistically individualist reaction to survive by any means necessary. The aforementioned *Hacker* portrays this by the protagonist aggressively seizing the digital means for himself to hack, steal and defeat his opponents whereas many of their other songs depict more viscerally violent scenarios of

the protagonist in confrontation with hostile forces. Their description of themselves as ‘futurist primitivists’ (Hill qtd. in Greene) furthermore implies an interest in futurist concepts, yet limited means to gain access to them. The group’s reoccurring evocation of Charles Manson and the Manson Family in their works establishes a key theme of

the degraded biological and psychological conditions of those excluded from wealth and well-being envisaged along the Summer of Love/Californian Ideology axis [...] the group attempt a framing of Manson and his family’s activities that seems to see to account for such behaviors – without condemning Manson or reacting with revulsion [...] The tracking of continuum from the dispossessed then to the dispossessed of the present, rather than from the hippies to the techno-boosters (Halligan 67).

Relating to affinities like these, the group has been met with criticism about their inclination to portray and seemingly celebrate violent and debauched activities while their employed register is vague enough to not support a cohesive stance on these subjects. Some have described their content and “antics” as merely masking their antagonistic instincts by making a spectacle out of everything (Powell). Nevertheless, the songs often portray narcissistic fulfillment of one’s needs with complete disregard for others and their feelings.

Hand yourself over

Remain calm

I only plan to steal

Whatever I want (Death Grips – Whatever I Want)

Fuck buying it, I’m taking it

And sharing it with nobody (Death Grips - Spread Eagle Cross the Block)

I’m on that v, on that yellow pill shit

Fuck the deal is, fuck, kill, steal shit, fuck real (Death Grips - Anne Bonny)

Most often these actions are related to maintaining an out-of-control drug habit. The portrayal of his exclusionary lifestyle consistently depicts the visceral ugliness of the scenarios and when placed in the context with other song subjects such as hacking and piracy, it is supportive of an anti-capitalist reading. These actions and attitudes are ingrained in their environment and due to the perceived inevitability of acceleration, no alternative is envisioned unless death counts as an option.

Where transgressive modernist art sought to break free from social constraints, and thereby to attain some Radical outside, accelerationist art remains entirely immanent, modulating its intensities in place (Shaviro 33).

While the hyper-capitalist is acceptant of the position, arguably Death Grips just express a much more violent reaction to it, tied to their position in increasing disparities. As the quote attributed to William Gibson – author of *Neuromancer*, another major influence for accelerationism – says: “the future is already here – it’s just not very evenly distributed” (Gibson qtd. in Wikiquote).

4.3 Representation of subculture discourses

While some of the band’s actions can be seen as embracing the more decentralized and democratized opportunities of internet, they are perhaps more inclined to depict the uglier aspects of internet subcultures. This is exemplified in naming an album *No Love Deep Web* along with other content concerning the titular deep web, the dark underbelly of the internet that cannot be accessed by standard search engines and conceals users’ digital footprints from surveillance and analysis. Most often it is reduced in the public consciousness to the place where one can buy and sell drugs easily. It also hosts the types of uncensored discussions that 4chan represents a more easily accessible version of. In this study, I include examples of how the band’s audience has interpreted parts of their music and co-opted that for their meme-centric discourse. Pitchfork critic Ian Cohen also notes the necessity of including the collective response into the discussion:

It’s borderline critical malpractice to look at any Death Grips album without considering how their fans will interact with it. Acknowledging that the project’s entire existence has been an elaboration on deep internet culture is a starting point for the conversation: What Lil Pump is to SoundCloud, what Car Seat Headrest is to Bandcamp, Death Grips are to 4chan (Cohen).

Interestingly, Cohen relates the other two artists to platforms where they have released their music whereas 4chan is primarily a forum for discussions. In the case of SoundCloud, the platform has become so associated with Lil Pump and other artists with a similar musical style that ‘SoundCloud rap’ is now acknowledged as a noteworthy subgenre in contemporary hip hop. As these emerging artists defined their musical styles, in turn they defined the platform they used to gain their relevance. While Death Grips have not released music directly on 4chan – apart from leaking *Year*

of the *Snitch*, allegedly – the quote suggests that the forum has been equally pivotal to their success and that their content can be described with a comparison to that of the content of 4chan.

The 4chan's themes and influences pulling from a history of transgression, that I previously detailed, are very similar to the works of Death Grips. To give one example, their first full-length release *Ex-Military* opens with *Beware*, the previously mentioned song specifically about transcending above the 'slave morality' of religions and becoming a 'beast' of one's own self-worship. Before the instrumental fully starts, the intro contains an extended sample from a Charles Manson interview. The previously detailed commonalities in transgressive works and 4chan discourse – sexual aggression, violence, insanity, surrealism and instinctual desire over moral constraints – are also noticeably similar to Death Grips' lyrical themes. Even when decidedly dark in content, their stream-of-consciousness lyrics are also filled with absurdist one-liners that in their non-sequitur style seem practically tailor-made for memes (see figure 10).



Figure 10. Death Grips meme “Idk I just connect to the lyrics a lot”

The band has been categorized as a ‘meme rock’ band on message boards which has then been analyzed as highlight two equally valid interpretations of the band,

both as a self-serious artistic project, and as a crassly commercial machine [...] On one hand, they are an experimental band that cancels shows as part of a noble, distant agenda, on the other, they are [...] a machine; every cancelled show and defiant album cover part of an unending grab for the arts-paper headlines (CClose).

Alongside all the conceptual portrayal of transgressive behavior – to some extent notable for its anticapitalistic sentiments – the band engages with their 4chan audience in ways that are in contrast to any type of traditional representation of a popular band. Yet in their accelerated pace of expressions and troll-like tendency to act against expectations they are relatable to the modes of communication these anonymous communities themselves employ. The band has also maintained the shoestring aesthetics that are essential to their music videos and other visual art. By doing so they simultaneously stay true to their intent of primitivism while also allowing for easy replication by the audience, like the countless parodies of the *No Love Deep Web* album cover display. The parodies are only a small part of the meme culture that surrounds the band which they have embraced as a significant part of their online presence, allowing the audience to become involved with their artistic process on a grass-roots level and even influence the resultant art product itself.

Yet the aforementioned brand of toxic masculinity – that the band represents in various ways – also sits uncomfortably next to egalitarianist statements in their interviews that I will examine more closely in the section 6.3. The *No Love Deep Web* album cover. Rather than the misogynist discourse on 4chan or Reddit, their statements align much more with contemporary feminist discourse on other platforms and the sex-positive culture of Tumblr that the band’s emphasis on BDSM-themed lyrics can arguably be seen as reminiscent of. In regards to other specific themes, mental ill-health and suicidal urges are preoccupations of Death Grips’ lyrics that to some extent bridge the gap between Tumblr and 4chan, even if their employed registers vary. Tumblr offers a safe space for open discussions and confessions regarding these matters but in contrast, when seemingly vulnerable posts about suicidal fantasies do occur on 4chan, they are often met with half-joking replies to go and do it, activity referred to as RIP trolling:

They thus reject the perceived sentimentality of the mainstream media’s suicide spectacles and instead remake it as their own dark spectacle, in which pity is replaced by cruelty. And yet, because both the act of suicide and the displays of insensitivity toward suicide victims are

perceived as forms of transgression, both found a home within this strangely internally coherent online world (Nagle 34).

Death and suicide occur very often in the lyrics and while the register varies from song to song, dark spectacle is an apt description for the macabre exploitation of these themes. The album *Jenny Death* is arguably Ride's most personal and serious exploration of depression and suicidal tendencies, culminating in *On GP* where he utters his real name, Stefan, in a verse about having a conversation with death. Elsewhere in the discography, Ride will in turns invoke killing himself as a visceral act of desperation, a defiant occultist will to transcend the earthly realm, a violent threat to others, or as a nonchalant joke. Then again, even a flippant joke about one's own suicidal tendencies is not too dissimilar from the discourse found on Tumblr. While the site can be credited as opening up an overdue conversation about mental health issues, the typical depression meme simplifies the complex issue into extreme self-deprecation through a "nihilistic lens" that instead of continuing the dialogue forward only serves to enable and reinforce a shared "state of resignation" (Tombs), as seen in figures 11-12. The suicidal memes and the related discourse act as a form of self-harm, instead of cutting oneself the users might create a meme about it. While it may seem like a distancing act from the physical harm, the performing of the scenario in memes is still a reaffirmation of one's negative self-image and desire to self-harm.



Figures 11-12. Depression memes

The consistent difference from 4chan discourse and its RIP trolling is found in maintaining a personal focus and not extending that callousness to others. The aforementioned projection of a

fan's suicide note in lieu of a live performance is the notable exception in elevating an audience member's possible suicide to a public spectacle. Arguably, it can be seen as band addressing the gravitas of the situation and that it would be crass for them to put on a regular performance but an equally valid argument could state that it is a crass decision to make their fan's suicidal ideations part of their art. The fact that this caused the disappointed audience at the venue to break the drum kit apart adds further complication to the validity of the decision as the suicide note's sender was an unwilling part in this spectacle.

Perhaps the most noteworthy contradiction of the online subculture in relation to Death Grips is the prevalent racist discourse on 4chan when one considers that Ride is an African-American man whose physical appearance the band's visual image is largely dependent on. On occasion Ride's lyrics reference his ethnicity directly but most often it is left unsaid, only sometimes discernible from the context. To some extent the contradictory relation to race issues can also be explained by the band's stated goal of trying to present the chaotic nature of the internet in their works.

You can be on a site like Slashdot, one of the most interesting, intelligent sites in the world [...] and at the same time you can have some porn open in another window, and be jacking off to it simultaneously [...] We believe that the future abolishes the notion of being able to profile people. You can't [...] attach stigma to anything, because the future is about all of these things happening simultaneously [...] I guess what I'm saying is that our music represents that (Hill qtd. in Gieben)

In their attempt to capture an analogous experience of the internet and an accelerated future, they sit at both sides of the current culture wars and create inherently contradictory content in regards to its politics. While the message board sub-communities comprising of the Death Grips audience may not be explicitly racist, or at least are not engaged in racist discourse with the band, there is a discussion to be had about the racist implications in their 4chan audience. After all, grassroots 4chan campaigns of trolling and spreading disinformation were instrumental in Trump's election and Brexit. The outlandish nature of the pranks and memes, like linking Hillary Clinton to an organized child abuse ring, mask the nationalist and racist agendas held by many of the prankers and the memes in turn strengthen the xenophobic motivations of many of the voters (Abbas; Hind). Upholding the virtue of transgression in a supposedly antipolitical tendency has the genuine danger of being hijacked by political forces and even explicitly violent transgressors.

5. The postmodern condition of “living on a stage”

An oft-occurring motif in the works of Death Grips is decreased privacy and the feeling of being watched. The band may willingly make a spectacle of themselves but in some ways these depictions can also be taken as an impressionistic depiction of typical 21st century life in a rapidly evolving information society, a depiction of

a generation that has grown up with the logic of uncertainty, children of the completed spectacle - no longer simply citizens of Guy Debord's 'society of spectacle' but a cult of spectacular individualities [...] a generation that lives as though always on stage, never without witness - whether that be the scopophilic gaze of others or the watchful eyes of the surveillance machine makes, perhaps, little difference (Hiebert 5).

While the personal toll of living in a society of spectacle and specifically the influence of contemporary online culture is a relatable phenomenon to many in this generation, the band's depictions also include a few key attributors that sets the depictions apart as more specific. Since the disjointed lyrical style rapidly jumps from one “topic” to the next inviting various possible interpretations of a single line, the most notably reoccurring attributors warrant their mentions here.

One of the most notable aspects depicted in Death Grips' lyrics is a visceral sense of paranoia. In addition to the surveillance aspect and voluntary recording of one's every-day life, drug abuse occurs very often in the lyrics and their effects are repeatedly depicted as heightening already existing fears and escalating the protagonist's self-destructive actions and dissociation from reality.

Losin' myself, I get the stares

What I'm lookin' at, wasn't there

Wasn't there, wasn't there

Wasn't there, wasn't there

Nothin' out there, can't stay inside

Hit the bar, sleep deprived

Who drove the car? I'm still alive (Death Grips – Get Got)

In a similar manner to how virtual reality is affecting even the moments of being logged off from all devices, there is a sense of long-lasting mental deterioration and blurring reality due to the constant

drug abuse. Whereas the drugs contribute to heightening internal anxieties and the recording of personal data in surveilling is an external issue that can affect a wide spectrum of people, there are two other noteworthy contributors in the protagonist being a specific person of interest to others.

The band members are all obviously public figures and the lyrics can often be interpreted to indicate that either Ride is talking about himself as an artist or that the 'I' suggests a collective representation of the band. These metatextual assertions are often centered on the band dominating their audience or the music industry, typically involving sexual and/or violent metaphors to depict the dynamic. Often the recipient is described as craving or even being addicted to this manner of treating them, shifting the thematic of drug use to suggest the band itself having a drug-like effect.

Let this craving slave you bad appoint your fix

My chemicals molest your sanity anoint at risk

Death classic, bitch

Gag on it, bitch (Death Grips – *Bottomless Pit*)

While referring to his chemicals effecting the recipient and them craving their next fix of drugs, the direct reference to one of their earliest songs *Full Moon (Death Classic)* makes it apparent that the employed perspective here is that of the band itself.

When the employed perspective implies a single protagonist and not a metatextual representation, it is generally understood as a consistent character who is personified by Ride. At this point it must be noted that Ride is an African-American man whereas Hill and Flatlander are both white. The representation of an African-American identity in relation to other themes in this study is notable enough to warrant its own section.

5.1 African-American identity

The most common sight of Ride at live shows, music videos and promotional materials is him without his shirt on revealing a fit upper torso covered in tattoos – many of them featuring occultist symbols – and the lower half of his body covered with black jeans and black shoes. Even the underwear that is partly visible from the top of his jeans is repeatedly in the same plaid pattern and

light blue color. This leads to indicate that he is portraying a consistent persona throughout the works of Death Grips.



Figures 13-16. Death Grips concert photograph by Pooneh Ghana, picture posted by Death Grips on Facebook before leaking *No Love Deep Web* [cropped] and Ride humping a car's rearview camera in *Double Helix* music video

In contrast to Ride, Hill and Flatlander have not maintained any kind of repeated costume choices that one could characterize them as having a consistent “uniform” within Death Grips. Flatlander was even unexplainedly absent from all of the band’s live shows and promotional appearances during the height of the *No Love Deep Web* controversy, further distancing himself from representing the band.

Even if there are relatively few times that Ride explicitly invokes his identity as an African-American man, the prevalent paranoia can also be interpreted as a result of prejudiced authorities targeting his ethnicity. This sort of confrontation with the police is alluded to in the song *Black Quarterback* from *niggas on the moon*, an album that is perhaps their most explicit foray into race commentary, although simultaneously noted as their most obtuse release. The title itself seems to be a reference to Gil-Scott Heron’s *Whitey on the Moon*, a famous spoken-word song about the disparity of the government using vast amounts of money to advance the space program while the

less privileged segments of the society, African-American communities in particular, continue to stay in poverty. Death Grips are not exactly making a passionate plea for improving race relations in America as much as they are perhaps exploring the black experience in America to its ugliest extent. While not often explicit, it is a subtext that critics have noted from their first releases forward, calling their music

a peerless depiction of what horror really means in underclass America – by method of showing rather than, as has traditionally been rap’s lingual M.O., telling [...] as voyeurs of black American misery we are now dragged from the sidelines and through a window that’s usually shut, and made to live the spectacle (Calvert 2012b).

Perhaps no song in their discography is more focused on depicting a paranoid sensation of being surrounded by hostile forces than the aforementioned *Come Up and Get Me*. The first verse describes the scenario as the protagonist being in an eight-floor high abandoned building and waiting for his opponents to come and try to kill him. The closing line of the verse “Shit’s ‘bout to get kamikaze, fuck a nazi” is the only explicit hint as to who he thinks is against him. Soon after, the first verse is repeated verbatim with the second rendition heightening the paranoia as Ride shouts it in a strained and out-of-breath voice, audibly cracking in the final lines. The following lines “When the world comes knocking, fuck the world, fuck this body” further indicate that he is prepared to fight against any and all opponents and does not care if he dies in the process. The last verse then reveals that it is not at all clear as to who is actually coming to attack him or if it is all just extreme paranoia in complete isolation from other people.

Think fast: Is it tear gas or fear masked

By figments of my fragmented mind?

Who's my enemy, them or me?

Step to me and you'll die

Grand delusions magnified

Fuck the truth, wastes my time

It's all good, bet; what's that?

Footsteps on the stairs?

Never could rest; they're always there

Who are they? I don't care

I just know they're tryin' to ex me

Give a fuck, come up and get me (Death Grips – *Come Up and Get Me*)

In this depiction, self-destructive actions and the mind turning against itself are practically inseparable from the hostility of external forces, the societal pressure influencing a self-hating reinforcement of its hegemonic ideology.

The frequent Charles Manson references in their lyrics are noteworthy when one considers the racial implications that were motivating Manson's actions. While Manson-like murderous ambitions steeped in a sort of twisted counter culture perspective are congruous with the mindset depicted in the Death Grips works, Ride's lyrics also feature specific references to the inherently racist scenario of Helter Skelter, Manson's prophecy of an upcoming race war which would end in the Manson family ruling over unorganized and unruly African-Americans, not unlike the persona that Ride portrays. Benjamin Halligan has suggested that Ride as a live performer invites impressions of a "drug-addled American hobo" inhabiting "savage" and "tribal" signifiers in his gestures, suggesting that the Ride's live performance style is another form of African-American's exclusionary status manifesting as a grotesque exaggeration of itself (70). On *Inanimate Sensation*, he goes as far as to self-deprecatingly refer to his "macaque skull", macaque being a genus of monkeys. If this representation indicates an amplification of prejudiced signifiers assigned to black Americans, it is thematically consistent with the depiction of a defeatist acceptance of exclusionary status and resorting to self-destructive ways as a result. While the thematic concerns might be related, in this defeatism they also differ from many of their post-internet contemporaries who have been noted for often making "passionate music for the age of Black Lives Matter, Me Too, and queer struggle" (Harper). Even Helter Skelter can be taken as a sort of accelerationist scenario, a dystopic amplification of a "rigged game".

The first releases from the band were sometimes described in reviews as entries in the subgenre of gangsta rap. At a time in the genre's history when most contemporary gangsta rap focused on the rewards of the hustle, Death Grips in contrast presented a heightened version of the visceral daily struggles to survive (Dead C). Bell Hooks, in her book *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*, writes extensively of her notion that gangsta culture is itself a reinforcement of patriarchal masculinity. It is a symptom of the prevailing political system, imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, not granting black men access to socially acceptable positions of power and dominance and yet socializing them to think that their manhood will be determined by the level of

domination and control they have on others; as a result many then claim their manhood through socially unacceptable channels (Hooks 57). They often feel a resulting sense of satisfaction in their ability to provoke fear in others, especially in white men:

Many black males explain their decision to become the “beast” as a surrender to realities they cannot change. And if you are going to be seen as a beast you may well act like one (Hooks 49).

As noted, Death Grips established their reminiscent key theme of becoming a “beast” as early as in the chorus of *Beware*, the opening song on their first-full length release.

I close my eyes and seize it

I clench my fist and beat it

I light my torch and burn it

I am the beast I worship (Death Grips – Beware)

At once a triumphant owning of one’s outsider status and a defeatist acceptance of capitalist realities, the actions driven by an apparent death drive are viscerally thrilling and yet undeniably self-destructive. The plight of the underprivileged black man is an evident example of how the capitalist system is built on an unequal power dynamic and even violent domination:

Mainstream white culture [...] both requires and rewards black men for acting like brutal psychopaths [...] rewards them for their will to do horrific violence. Cultures of domination, like the United States, are founded on the principle that violence is necessary for the maintenance of the status quo (Hooks 49).

As a heightened amplification of gangsta tropes, at a distance from realistic depictions of street life by ‘socially conscious’ artists, Death Grips highlights the thrill that audience might be looking for in the genre. Simultaneously, it comments on this expectation by turning the domination dynamic against its own audience, apt in light of Hooks notion that psychohistories of white racism historically highlight a

tension between the construction of the black male body as danger and the underlying eroticization that always then imagines that body as a location for transgressive pleasure (Hooks 79-80).

Gangsta rap and other forms of popular entertainment dependent on these depictions act then as a contemporary form of commodification of blackness that teaches its audience that

this perceived threat, whether real or symbolic, can be diffused by a process of fetishization that renders the black masculine 'menace' feminine through a process of patriarchal objectification (Hooks 80).

In the neo-colonialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy the black man is an object, an image made consumable and enjoyed through commodity fetishism. The transgression of hegemonic norms merely reinforces the value judgments of the prevailing system. By that definition, Ride's image is actually congruous with the post-internet concept of one's commodified self to hyper-capitalist patriarchy. There is merely a stark contrast between how patriarchy objectifies, for example, a woman or a black man, both of the heightened representations nevertheless disturbing in their own ways. In the section 6.2 Transgression and rebellion, I will examine more closely how the band specifically depicts these transgressive actions of sexual and violent nature. The commodification of Ride's repressed status extends even to his death, as exemplified on the *niggas on the moon* album opening *Up My Sleeves*, a heavy song about suicidal ideations.

I'll take my life like I kept it [...]

Up my sleeves, I'll take my life anyway I can fetish

Snatch my fetish, snatch it only as directed [...]

Up my sleeves, feel my slur, quench my hearse [...]

I'm whirling, ohh, my agony's priceless

I'll take my life any way you can slice it [...]

If you can't snatch my fetish, I'll FedEx it

Notify me when you miss it (Death Grips – *Up My Sleeves*)

The lyrics link together fetishization of his own death and turning it into commerce, his self-destruction a commodity to be fetishized by the audience. There is a sense of empowerment in him taking his life like he has kept it, therefore acting according to his free will, in distilling it into art but to be received “only as directed”, and in still maintaining a mystery around this spectacle, regarding it as magic trick hidden up his sleeves.

In regards to black self-representation in hip hop, it is noteworthy that the album title *niggas on the moon* is the only time that the word ‘nigga’ appears in their discography. One would almost expect to find it at least once in their lyrics since the word is so notably used by other hip hop artists and

Death Grips lyrics are definitely not the most reserved in terms of employing sensitive vocabulary. It is almost as if Ride is purposefully leading the audience with loaded signifiers to expect the word in this context, yet abstaining from articulating it and instead by putting it into the title, he puts his audience into the position of having to decide whether to address the word when discussing the album.

The image of Death Grips is consistently personified by Ride to the extent that it is easy to forget that the album title would not even be socially acceptable to say out loud for Flatlander and Hill either, i.e. two thirds of the band themselves. In the public context, this has not been an issue as the band had stopped giving interviews by the time of releasing said album and have not given one since. In 2016 they went as far as to upload a video onto YouTube called *Interview 2016* where a reporter is first seen observing their band rehearsals, then interviewing them all one-by-one and ending in a press conference but all of the audio in the video is replaced with new instrumental tracks, released shortly after as an EP with the same name. Not only have they increasingly refrained from explaining their intent and left their audience to interpret subsequent works without interference but with *Interview 2016* the band actively teases the need for more traditional band representation and yet again, invites their audience to fill in the blanks.

Additionally, it must be noted that while I am making differentiations between instances where the lyrics are suggesting, for example, a metatextual representation of the band's position in the music industry or a visceral depiction of an African-American man's struggles on the outskirts of society, the common mode of expression in the works of Death Grips encompasses many of these key themes at once. The lyrics often deliberately play with the possibility of a single word raising the possibility of multiple interpretations which is then further enhanced by the stream-of-consciousness style of the lyrics rapidly shifting its perspective and setting.

6. Masculinity in crisis

While the notion of an African-American identity is pertinent to examining Death Grips, perhaps more notably their works speak of a wider phenomenon of traditional masculinity in crisis in the 21st century. Some parts of this thematic exploration can be tied specifically to the ethnic identities, represented within the band by black and white members. In general, trying to articulate a coherent stance on a given issue based on their works is challenging and a large corpus review reveals at times a somewhat chaotic set of semiotics that suggests many contradicting views therein, some of them tied specifically to ethnic identities and gender differences. At any rate, performing masculinity in a specifically aggressive and antagonistic manner is a reoccurring characteristic. This has a specific significance in relation to its accelerationist context, as rebellion against accelerationist technology or giving into the allure that it is providing.

6.1 Sensory angst and blurring lines between body and technology

The effects of engaging with explicit material online is explored in *I've Seen Footage* where Ride describes watching several real-life instances of violence captured on video and spread online.

Armored cop open fire Glock

On some kid who stepped so

Fast was hard to grasp what even happened 'til you seen that head blow

Off his shoulders in slow-mo

Rewind that, it's so cold

Rewind that, it's so cold [...]

Little tiger, boy soldier

Twist cap back and kill (Death Grips – I've Seen Footage)

There is an impulse to rewind and watch this readily available violent footage again and again even though he is aware enough to regard his paranoid mindset as a direct result of it.

Stimulation overload account for it

Desensitized by the mass amounts of shit

I've seen it, I've been it

Can't delete it, feels like jail (Death Grips – *I've Seen Footage*)

“Stimulation overload”, the endless barrage of information in contemporary society is what Ride accounts as the root of his problem. The power of images is reminiscent of Francis Fukuyama’s notions of how living in modern capitalistic society inevitably corrupts one’s needs: when an opportunity to satisfy a need presents itself, a person will often seize upon the opportunity, the kaleidoscopic wealth of choices inherently “spilling over” into moral and social norms (14, 48). Here, when the possibility of accessing violent footage is presented to practically anyone with an unrestricted internet connection, the impulse to do so is therefore presented to the internet user without questioning the ethics of doing so. The screen flattens the content represented therein into a hyperreality, the state described by Jean Baudrillard in which destabilized images of real and imaginary are seamlessly blended together, with no clear distinction between where the real ends and the fiction begins. This can cause one to be more in tune with the hyperreal world and less with the physical real world (3). In the hyperreality of Death Grips, there is a thin line from being a passive watcher to repeating similar acts. I noted earlier of reviews calling the music a form of body horror; Consequence of Sound critic Jeremy D. Larson went as far as to call them “the *Videodrome* of hip-hop”, comparing the band’s cumulative effect to David Cronenberg’s seminal science fiction body horror film *Videodrome* in how

there’s a whole alternate network Death Grips have created. It’s like a pirate music channel you’re not sure you should be watching because you’re not exactly sure how real it (Larson).

The similarities go even further as the film depicts the main character, Max Renn, being increasingly influenced by the pirate broadcasts; the influence of technology on body is made explicit as the cancerous signals of Videodrome cause him to grow a vaginal opening in his stomach which is then used to insert brainwashing videotapes into him, igniting his murderous spree. Death Grips proposes a similar causality between the violence and the exposure to media’s brainwashing, *Culture Shock* stating in plain words

You're the media's creation, yeah, your free will has been taken and you don't know (Death Grips – *Culture Shock*)

The film also implies a similar blurring of sexual excitement with the thrill of violence, as Renn is lured into Videodrome’s control with sexual hallucinations. Perhaps not quite as hackneyed an

argument as to simply warn away from violent films for fear of inspiring similar behavior but suggesting something a bit more ambiguous about the power of images and subliminal influencing in a dystopian accelerationist context.

Just as *Videodrome* leaves open the question of whether Renn's visions are implied to be real or mere hallucinations, Ride's mental state is of ambiguous quality. Online content, waking life and dreams are all blending in his mind. "What's that? Can't tell / Handheld dream shot in hell" (Death Grips – *I've Seen Footage*) relates a dream resembling the style of handheld shot footage typical to the types of amateur videos described in the song and the use of 'delete' in relation to memories also shows blurring lines between body and technology. "Static on my blindside" (ibid.) furthermore describes how he conceptualizes the real world not in his immediate line of vision as the static noise of a television screen, reminiscent of the music video for *Guillotine* (see Figure 9.).

Although Death Grips often depict the dividing lines between body and technology in transitory states, Ride's vocals are a startlingly human element in the group's sonic palette. In contrast to a lot of electronic music that often attempts to meld the human voice into its computerized sounds, with vocoders and Auto-Tune or other effects, Ride's vocals are only very rarely processed with digital effects and instead he pushes his voice to its extremes revealing its inherently human tenor, evoking a violent clash to its digital surroundings (Halligan 68). Yet his vocals are also digitally compressed to be consistently elevated at all times to match the loudness of the musical accompaniment that is of a dense and highly compressed nature as well.

Many post-internet artists have also opted for visually obstructed presentations when performing live. Examples include a showcase performance by the artists of the PC Music record label where SOPHIE's performance consisted of a drag queen acting as the DJ while SOPHIE herself stood off stoically stage dressed as a security guard (Waugh 123-124) or a QT performance where the artist reclined flipping through a fashion magazine nonchalantly as a voiceover kept advertising the energy drink, followed by "deliberately unconvincing" lip-synching performance to her only song (Sherburne). The usual Death Grips live experience – not counting their numerous no-show "performances" – differs from those with a highly energetic performance in lieu of a conceptual presentation. Their visual accompaniments have featured playbacks of their music videos playing on upright iMac computer screens or a back projection of a short gif looping for the entirety of the show, their modesty offering only slight embellishments to the live experience where the main focus is clearly on the band members physical presence and performance. A minimal presentation is not, however, uncommon within post-internet genre, as many of the artists are not hugely popular

and a lavish stage production representing their futuristic themes would be quite expensive to produce.

Commonly, a Death Grips set list is sequenced into a non-stop sequence of music with the outro of one song leading directly into the intro of the next song with no breaks in between. This accentuates their refusal to engage with the audience in the context of traditional on-stage banter, supporting the notion of the band being a constant conceptual performance that does not allow for breaks in character. It also presents the live show as a demanding endurance test, in accordance with the music's depiction of a body in physical stress. The live shows must be particularly demanding for Hill due to his unusual performance style. While Flatlander plays the songs on his sampler to a close approximation of the recorded versions with the electronic drum parts already included, Hill plays by accentuating the recorded drums with a fill-heavy style which in practice means him filling every beat of a given song, meaning even less time for him to rest during the show than for his band members (Hill qtd. in Pitchfork Weekly). Hill equates his primal-sounding, down-tuned and minimal set up to Ride's performance style with nothing but a microphone and his own physique, featuring "nothing obstructive" (ibid.), simultaneously accentuating the motif in the music of depicting the human/computer dynamic as "mutual sonic warfare" (Halligan (68).

In addition to live performances, the physical struggle of Hill's devotion to performing is accented in the *No Love* music video where he beats his drums with his bare fists and carries a large loudspeaker on his shoulders, his pained expressions and physical appearance recalling the iconography of Christ carrying the cross (ibid.). The group has also uploaded a stretch of rehearsal footage onto YouTube where Hill is seen in hand-cuffs and yet still managing to perform the fast-paced and demanding songs with this significant hindrance, although clearly struggling physically.

Conversely, the band has also portrayed an opposing sentiment to their several depictions of techno-anxieties. In *Inanimate Sensation*, human interactions are depicted as unsatisfactory in comparison to engagement with inanimate objects, culminating in the final verse with "I like my iPod more than fuckin'" (Death Grips – *Inanimate Sensation*). The song consistently depicts the isolated lifestyle as aspirational and situations with other people as having little meaning to him.

Inanimate situation

No relation, close liaison

No conversation, no social contagion [...]

Inanimate surge of inspiration

Glow like thermonuclear invasion

Compared to swapping thoughts; regurgitation

I revel in lack of slightest acquaintance (ibid.).

The inspiration to create is also tied to an inanimate source. A similar sentiment was expressed by Ride in an interview where he said to no more find inspiration from humans or their achievements rather than from internal struggle (Ride qtd. in Pitchfork Weekly). In contrast, he still lists several items and substances that contribute to these ‘inanimate sensations’.

My smoke, my butane

My boots, my headphones, my medicated noose

My deadroom, my schwartwald hat, my Mac

My macaque skull, my lysergic stash [...]

Spots to get that get right

When I gotta get right some more

Type of get right I can't afford

I covet these things more than any living (Death Grips – Inanimate Sensation)

The references to substances (smoke, butane, lysergic stash) are linked together with technological devices (headphones, Mac), suggesting that they have a similar value in his judgment. The end of the verse yet again depicts this engagement as addictive behavior, all contributing slowly but surely to his eventual demise, his “medicated noose”. On r/deathgrips, the song has been discussed as another example of the concept of commodity fetishism, the “sexually charged” and quasi-religious belief that an inanimate object will gratify one’s desires (*Hey Everyone, I'm Doing an Oral Presentation on Inanimate Sensation, is there Anything I'm Missing?* thread on r/deathgrips Reddit).

It is perhaps worth noting that the song’s hook is the most notable example of a reoccurring stylistic for the band where the instrumental hooks created by synthesizers resemble engines revving up or winding down, displaying similarity to industrial music. Many songs feature a variation of this instead of a discernible chord sequence but in *Inanimate Sensation* the tendency is taken further as Ride’s voice actually mimics the revving up synthesizer, quite literally joining the machine in synchronous accelerating.

Specifically, the verse detailing the items and substances is also the first instance of Ride's vocals being artificially manipulated for an extended section as the entirety of the verse is pitched down to a significantly lower register. In listing the inanimate objects that he values above humans, Ride sounds the least human that he ever has up to this point.

6.2 Transgression and rebellion

An overwhelming majority of the band's lyrics are written from a first-person perspective and a number of signifiers leads one to perceive the 'I' consistently as a masculine one. As much as one can describe Ride as a crafted persona, it is the subjective prism through which to interpret nearly everything in their discography – *On GP* from *Jenny Death* is the obvious outlier, the only song of theirs where he refers to himself by his real name in a supposedly genuine moment of personal introspection. That masculine identity is most often identifiable in conjunction with the image of Ride, consistently seen without a shirt revealing his fit, tattoo-covered upper torso and often described as a scary appearance (Gieben). As noted, often that perspective is malleable enough to also suggest the 'I' meaning Death Grips as a collective subject. Music critic Anthony Fantano has suggested the band having a "BDSM style relationship" with their audience (Fantano 2015) and that disposition certainly extends into many of the violent or sexually aggressive descriptions in the lyrics as well. To give one example, here is an excerpt from the title track of *Bottomless Pit*, the album that focuses most explicitly on the relationship that they have with their audience.

I fucked you in half

I see you fiending marvelous

Gagballs drooling pools 'cause

I see you fiending marvelous [...]

My cum hatch in you

Struck books of match in you

Subwoofer I'm dry humping (Death Grips – *Bottomless Pit*)

In a characteristic register, Ride boasts about his (sexual) prowess with exaggeratedly violent descriptions. The metaphors move on to suggest an igniting influence this sexual encounter has on

the other party which is then further distanced from a literal interpretation by including musical imagery to suggest it is specifically the band's music that has this influence on the listener.

One of their more explicit songs *No Love* seems to alternate between descriptions of the protagonist on a bad psychedelics trip and him beating down on someone.

How the trip never stops

On and on, it's beyond insane

Why I set myself up

In a raging sea of flames? [...]

Rack a snitch, chalk and cue you [...]

Dead bitch float, swollen corpse

No remorse, navigated off course

Off course I can make you scream but if you ask for more

Bullshit, matador, grab the floor, whip it cracked to all fours

You whimper while I check my phone (Death Grips – No Love)

Two mentions of murder – one with the outline of their body drawn in chalk on a crime scene and the other floating in water – seem to suggest that the beating is fatal whereas the rest of the song depicts the scenario as more reminiscent of BDSM context where the submissive party craves this treatment while the dominant party reacts to their pain as less important than nonchalantly checking his phone. Notably, both sides are portrayed as being “addicted” to this behavior.

Fuck it, now I can't quit, will never be the same [...]

You won't do shit

But beg me to do this

Again and again and again and again (ibid.)

As the violent scenario is depicted as a direct result from drugs or as practically interchangeable from them – after all, it is not clear if the addiction is to the drug or to violence – it is possible that the perspective shifts from the protagonist on drugs to the drug itself taking violent control of him. This would not be the only time that the band seems to portray an anthropomorphized perspective

of a drug. A similar approach is found in the song *You might think he loves you for your money but I know what he really loves you for it's your brand new leopard-skin pillbox hat.*

Come come fuck apart in here

I die in the process

You die in the process [...]

I become you

Opening of the mouth

Unlawful possession

Jellyfish in cold sweat deep end

Hollow shell twitch disconnection

Pupils swell

My entrance

Hijacked no questions asked

Stretch you on like latex mask (Death Grips – You might think...)

Dying in the process is likely a reference the phenomenon of ego death, the temporary loss of one's self that can occur on psychedelics. Swelling of pupils and twitchiness support this interpretation as both are noted side effects of psychedelics use. In this context, the "unlawful possession" has two probable interpretations: a reference to holding of illegal drugs or the protagonist possessing another person. References such as entering through the mouth and latex masks keep contributing to a body of work where BDSM or violent assault are often possible interpretations or feasible connotations caused by the deliberate ambiguity of the lyrics.

Whether one interprets scenarios like this or the one in *No Love* as metaphorical or realistically descriptive, both options indicate, at the very least inadvertently, an aggressive outlook towards women and feminine qualities, inherent in the constant use of 'bitch' or in the sexually explicit descriptions of aggressive domination. While content of this sort is nothing new in rap, neither is a reliance on genre characteristics any shield against criticizing it and although Ride has been praised for his ability to evoke vivid images with his intense performance, critics have also questioned the merits of their misogynistic lyrics (Van Dalsem). This is tied to an often-occurring debate about

how necessary or worthy such representation of misogyny is when hip hop has so perpetually been criticized for it and arguably even satirically heightened or other conceptual approaches to it perhaps add little to the related conversation at this point.

The ambiguity of much of the content is what makes criticism against it easy. Often it is left ambiguous as to just who is the protagonist so aggressive towards and who is the ‘bitch’ that an overwhelming number of their songs point to. As mentioned, often the aggression is directed at their own audience. At other times it can be a case of turning the language of the oppressor against themselves such as in the anti-capitalistic sentiment expressed in the song Hacker where the protagonist boasts “The table’s flipped, now we got all the coconuts, bitch” (Death Grips – Hacker). If one considers the aggression in line with a depiction of a black experience and a rebellion against an oppressing society, it is conceivable to read it all as objectifying the objector.

Within neo-colonial white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the black male body continues to be perceived as the embodiment of bestial, violent, penis-as-weapon hypermasculine assertion (Hooks 79).

Ride’s persona is certainly reminiscent of Hook’s description. It performs the characteristics prescribed to the stereotype and, as a sort of wish fulfillment, turns the performance against the oppressor that, as noted, is more rebellious and self-destructive in its myopia as opposed to genuinely revolutionary or emancipatory. Even if the position of ‘an oppressed black man against the white-supremacist capitalism’ is a more acceptable contextualization for the portrayed antagonism, the objectifying language of the oppressor and the mode of violent domination are still continued in it.

As much as the conversation around the band has placed them in the context of experimental hip hop, their hybrid of musical styles encompasses so many influences that it is equally appropriate to examine them as a part of larger rock music context as well, as many critics have indeed done. By that rubric, Death Grips fit into typical depictions of rebellion in rock. As Reynolds and Press note,

in the rebel imagination, women figure as both victims and agents of castrating conformity. Women represent everything the rebel is not (passivity, inhibition) and everything that threatens to shackle him (domesticity, social norms). This ambivalence towards the feminine domain is the defining mark of all the classic instances of rock rebellion (Reynolds and Press 3).

Reynolds and Press suggest that in his desire to break free from societal constraints the rebel may himself worship a sort of “abstract femininity (a home away from home)” but still express fear and

contempt towards real-life women (ibid.). He rebels against the heteronormative society yet does not recognize his masculine identity as part of the system he is rebelling against. Differentiating between the rebel and the revolutionary according to Jean-Paul Sartre's definition,

the rebel is secretly complicit with the Order he revolts against. His goal is not to create a new and better system; he only wants to break the rules. In contrast the revolutionary is constructive, aims to replace an unfair system with a new, better system, and is therefore self-disciplined and self-sacrificing (ibid.).

The more explicitly political bands, that may at first glance appear as revolutionary and emancipatory, often express a sentiment of strong unity among their specific group, their gang of rebel men against the world. In doing so they rarely even address other sexes at all and instead of a more inclusionary message they only end up reinforcing the homosocial aspects of their male-centric gang mentality. Bands like The Clash and Public Enemy further exemplify this by singing the praises of other revolutionary men and crafting their image by appropriating stylistic signifiers from their heroic role models, all of them exclusively men (Reynolds and Press 67, 77-78).

Even if one does not want to necessarily suggest a latent misogyny in all portrayals of rebellious or revolutionary men in exile from feminine domesticity, one must consider how the supposed emancipation of the masculine self appears to other sexes. Especially when the depicted actions are of a violent or sexually aggressive kind, rejecting domestic masculinity to a rebellious one might not have the most righteous appearance, whether the underlying intentions are good or not.

6.3 The *No Love Deep Web* album cover

The surprise release of *No Love Deep Web* likely constitutes as the band's most controversial action to date, in more ways than one. Of its various implications, I will focus on what such sexually explicit material suggests when placed in this context.

Directly after the release of *The Money Store*, the band was scheduled to go on tour and to release a second album on Epic Records later in the fall but instead they abruptly canceled the entire tour in order to focus on recording the upcoming album. Following months of mostly silence from the band, the group posted two messages on their Facebook page:

The label wouldn't confirm a release date for NO LOVE DEEP WEB 'till next year sometime'

The label will be hearing the album for the first time with you” (Death Grips).

A day later, a photograph with no caption was posted on their Facebook page that showed Ride standing dangerously on the ledge of a Chateau Marmont balcony with both of his middle fingers raised high (see figure 14). The album *No Love Deep Web* was then posted online to download for free, an action that was completely unauthorized by their label. Adding to the already controversial nature of the release, the album cover is an explicit photograph of an erect penis with the title written across it (see figure 17).



Figure 17. *No Love Deep Web* album cover

No Love Deep Web, described by many as their darkest album, is certainly their most blatantly abrasive statement especially when one contextualizes the album cover in conjunction with its content. The aesthetic of the presentation is deliberately amateurish and crude, undoubtedly for many – predominantly women – reminiscent of the ‘dick pics’ that they have received as instant messages regardless of their desire to receive such a picture unprompted. In terms of consensual engagement with sexual material, there is perhaps a thin line between clicking one’s message inbox open or clicking on a link provided by a band only to find oneself looking at an erect penis. The latter is a public act that explicitly mirrors the former in its presentation.

At the time of the release, the cover only added insult to injury of a breached record contract and many read it as a “taunt to their record label” (Weingarten). Death Grips responded to this and accusations about it being a publicity stunt again on their Facebook page; the band posted screenshots of e-mails that they had received from the legal department of Epic Records following the unauthorized leak. These pictures that the group posted, again, without permission from the

label and now also in violation of private correspondence confidentiality were captioned with "HAHAHAHAHAHAHA NOW FUCK OFF" (Death Grips).

The band has elaborated on their choice to use such an image in two interviews. In an interview for Spin, Hill and Ride express disappointment in the public not seeing past the offensiveness of the picture and presuming that the purpose of it was nothing but a juvenile prank. Hill admits that it is indeed his penis but adds that it feels "sacrificial" to reveal the source of it and uses words like "spiritual" and "tribal" to suggest alternative ways to interpret it (Hill qtd. in Weingarten). In a later interview for Pitchfork, he repeats many of the same arguments, continuing:

We started Death Grips being very pro-homosexual and pro-individual-- the idea of being OK with yourself no matter what. It really has to do with acceleration-- culturally, on a world level-- of sexuality in general, and getting past homophobia. People should be able to look deeper into something rather than just seeing some dick. It's also a spiritual thing; it's fearlessness.

As a group, we're perceived in large part as male or very aggressive, but we don't think about those things. There is no gender to this group. It's androgynous. But we know that perception. Peoples' hangups with sexuality, gender, and nudity-- it's similar to how I feel about organized religion. It's toxic and poisonous to the human mind, and the development of humans in the modern world. In our own modest way, through our artwork, that's what it represents: pushing past everything that makes people slaves without even knowing it (Hill qtd. in Pelly).

While the artistic intent is worthy of consideration and provides additional viewpoints to assess, one has to judge the result on a wider set of criteria. Put another way, such a potent image has a number of connotations in addition to its attempted denotation whether they were intended or not. It is certainly understandable how adorning one's art with an explicit picture of one's genitals suggests fearlessness and a palpable extension of 'putting it all out there' for one's own artistic expression. It is even conceivable how the matter-of-factness of such presentation in an unforeseen context is cause to re-examine one's stance on why exactly is it in contrast to culturally accepted conventions of art and depictions of sexuality, gender or nudity therein. Forget its context as a visual companion to a popular music album and the image appears more reminiscent of a piece of modern art where the model of elevating vulgar material by re-contextualizing has admittedly more precedence. Maybe not as substantial a statement as Marcel Duchamp placing a urinal in an art gallery – the artwork that they coincidentally reference in the song *Big Dipper* – but arguably a Duchampian act in spirit, congruous with a body of work that have led them to be described as Dadaists in their own right (Ratliff). While the band could certainly be described postmodernists in certain aspects, their

work does not always suggest a postmodern condition of narrowing the gap between high and low forms of expression as it does more often portray a concentrated celebration of all things low.

In the same Pitchfork interview, Hill also relates the band bonding over admiration for “body artist” Chris Burden who would put himself in serious harm’s way for his performance art pieces, most notoriously getting shot in the shoulder with a rifle. Hill describes artists like Burden as

people that would really go to almost a sacrificial place, to project a certain energy that would really push the limits of their own human meat-cage, to get across this hyper-internalized feeling (Hill qtd. in Pelly).

Moreover, on the album *Year of the Snitch* the band collaborated on two songs with Lucas Abela, a noise musician famous for his main instrument, a pane of glass fitted with contact microphones and connected to effects pedals. Abela plays this instrument with his mouth, often leaving his face bleeding after live performances that he himself calls “crossing the line between music and bloodsport” (Abela qtd. in NME Blog). Aligning with artists like Burden and Abela adds to the band’s consistent concerns on what the body can express, what it can endure and, a specific theme to post-internet art, what will the body look like in the future. The body is used as another instrument, not to be limited to its standardized functions alone but instead to express an ambiguously “hyper-internalized feeling” by putting it on display and manipulating it.

The reference to cover’s intent of moving past homophobia is perhaps due to Hill’s awareness that Death Grips audience is predominantly male and presumptive of the types of men who might gravitate towards aggressive music or who post on boards where a notable part of the Death Grips fan community gathers. Despite the discernible cultural anxieties in their work, a significant amount of toxic masculinity is still present in much of it. Even if the perspective of being the one attacked upon – or the sense of being attacked upon – is notably more prominent here than on their other releases, this is still an album that contains lyrics such as “You’re a bitch made to be crushed” (Death Grips – No Love) and “I’m the coat hanger in your man’s vagina” (Death Grips – Deep Web), the latter example perhaps indicating an anthropomorphized perspective of the ominous deep web itself. Nevertheless, as much leeway as one can give to the lofty intentions of the album cover, it is still an intrusive cover image especially when considered in relation to the music contained within and it is easy to interpret it as an act of aggression.

It seems that Death Grips cannot get past an inherent contradiction here; their stated aspirations and the innovative approach to music speak of the benefits of accelerationism, yet the lyrics depict desperate situations with the protagonist resorting to violent and self-destructive actions. Perhaps it

is in that tension where the band articulates an increasingly emergent sentiment of the times, a sense of trying to keep up with the accelerating world alternating between excitement and desperation: “Like it or not, we’re all accelerationists now” (Shaviro 34). On additional note, if it were Ride pictured on the cover, one would likely associate that image more readily with the violent character of Ride in the songs. The fact that it is Hill helps to keep the different modes of expression separate and to not make the conceptual violence portrayed in the music too explicit. This is not to suggest that the band is trying to portray something as simplistic as these inclinations being somehow defined by the two ethnicities that happen to coincide with the different modes. Perhaps more accurate would be to look at it as one of many contradictory sentiments in a body of work that offers a variety of gender performances.

6.4 Gender and sexuality in post-internet music

Death Grips are defined largely by masculinity, setting them apart from many of their post-internet contemporaries. Many of the musicians in the genre have, in fact, expressed indebtedness in their thinking to gender theorists such as Judith Butler and their statements such as that

gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts precede; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts (Butler 519).

The performative nature of gender has found a natural outlet in virtual spaces where people experiment with personas and identities, a habit which has then influenced the artistic content of these musicians (ibid.). In this light it is notable that the cover art of *The Money Store* (see figure 18) depicts a sadomasochistic scenario where the masochistic party has the name of the band carved in their chest while the sadistic party has the letters ER written in her hand, referring presumably to the label Epic Records. Their bodies also suggest a subtle separation from heteronormative depictions: ‘Epic Records’ has clearly feminine features and breasts but also visible body hair whereas ‘Death Grips’ is completely hairless and also bears breasts but nevertheless a very masculine appearing physique.



Figure 18. *The Money Store* album cover

It would probably be a stretch to assign a line like “I’m the coat hanger in your man’s vagina” (Death Grips – Deep Web) with an intent of portraying fluid gender identities rather than being merely a particularly nasty threat. The closest the band comes to distancing from a masculine perspective is perhaps briefly in the song *Pss Pss* where Ride raps “If I were her and she was him, we would go and fuck ourselves again and again” (Death Grips – *Pss Pss*). Coincidentally, the song revolves around urinating on a person for sexual pleasure, adding to Death Grips’ depictions of sexual deviations that have most prolifically involved sadomasochistic sex. Not unexpectedly, Ride depicts himself as the one urinating, continuing a portrayal of himself dominating others in sexual situations. Arguably the depiction of such deviances can still be seen as a continuance of sexual exploration in internet subcultures like on Tumblr where users have been more willing to try their limits by playfully performing sexuality under the guise of different personas or expressing their honest desires with the safety provided by the platform’s promise of anonymity.

In contrast to Ride, Mykki Blanco is another African-American rapper in the genre but one who consistently expresses his artist persona in flux between traditionally feminine and masculine appearances (see figures 19-20). Waugh proposes that Blanco is essentially “gender fluidity in action”, in how he is

defined by his ‘multiplicity’ [...] he can, at different times, be seen dressed as a glamorous diva, ‘shirtless Michael, with the head shaved’, a ‘Madame Libertine’ figure, and ‘a blue-eyed “genderless”’ being, all of whom frequently employ ‘consciously macho’ lyrics [...] He can appear in any costume, representing any gender, and still be Mykki Blanco (Waugh 171).



Figures 19-20. Mykki Blanco – *Haze.Boogie.Life* music video

Gender fluidity in these depictions has no more importance than choices in costume or other ways of molding one's appearance. While some Blanco lyrics are open about his gay experiences, much of the other lyrics, on their surface, do not seem too dissimilar from the Death Grips lyrics coming from a stand-offish masculine perspective.

Blah blah blah blah Blanco

Loose at the mouth

Bitch niggas gone retardo [...]

Mindfuck a bitch, they call my dick Magneto [...]

Bitch you better think before you throw that shade

I put that pussy up for sale - black market slave trade (Mykki Blanco – YungRhymeAssassin)

'Bitch' is used quite freely, as are other slurs here and in songs like *For the Cunts*, a celebratory club rap anthem about the shared gay subculture between the artist and the gay fanbase. The pejorative language from a black queer perspective transforms the register even further, redefining oppressive language by appropriating it to one's own means. Depending on the context, 'bitch', 'nigga' or 'cunt' can be a slur or expression of solidarity, among other more ambivalent uses.

As for other queer identities, the most notable example of transgender identity in post-internet music has to be the Grammy-nominated SOPHIE. With the release of her 2017 single and music video, *It's Okay to Cry*, she abstained from further attempts to remain anonymous and began using her own voice and image in her work, as well as subsequently speaking openly about her identity as a transgender woman.



Figure 21. SOPHIE - *It's Okay to Cry* music video

The song was the lead single for her 2018 album *Oil of Every Peal's Un-Insides*. Therein the concept of gender fluidity is mirrored in how her usually uncanny bubblegum pop song are contrasted with the liquidy ambient of the wordless instrumentals and how visual sea imagery accompanies songs like *Is it Cold in the Water?*

I'm freezing

I'm burning

I've left my home [...]

I'm swimming, I'm breathing, evaporating [...]

*I'm liquid, I'm floating into the blue (SOPHIE – *Is it Cold in the Water?*)*

The titular question is repeated throughout in a wary curiosity for jumping into the water, transitioning into a different sense of being. The lyrics consistently evoke the ephemeral transience of this and the many conflicting sensations that stem from it. Later in the album, *Immaterial* highlights the ultimate immateriality of gender and identity.

You could be me and I could be you

Always the same and never the same [...]

Without my legs or my hair

Without my genes or my blood [...]

Tell me, where do I exist? [...]

Immaterial girls, immaterial boys

Any form, any shape, anyway, anything, anything I want (SOPHIE – Immaterial)

The bouncy pop instrumental only bolsters the desirability of being unbound from physicality and even from a subjective experience of one's self. In contrast to these gender fluid artists, Ride's portrayal of gender is more akin to a sense of imprisonment in the masculine identity and male body, an inability to escape from it. Where SOPHIE and others stress fluidity and immateriality, Ride is pointedly material and visceral, exerting his physicality to desperate extent, performing the most violent and ugly parts of his masculine nature. Sexual desires are restricted to the basest way of achieving pleasure for himself and he consistently rejects any form of intimacy related to the act, as in *Fuck Me out* where he repeatedly asks "Let's fuck, let's fuck, just don't touch me, just fuck fuck me" (Death Grips – *Fuck Me Out*) or in *I Want It I Need It* where the band's once-stated intent on channeling the id for their art is apparent in the song's drug-fueled exploits.

As you keep getting higher

Lights look like they're on fire

Soon all that's left of you

Is your most primal desires (Death Grips – I Want It I Need It)

Then again, these primal instincts are also at odds with the relationship to technology as the aforementioned *Inanimate Sensation* suggests with its lyrics about him preferring his iPod to sex. However, sometimes the two can be intertwined, as technology can cater to person's sexual needs as well which I will explore in the next section.

6.5 Posthumanism and *Artificial Death in the West*

In regards to posthuman view on gender identity, women and sexual minorities have been more prone to use posthumanist concepts for emancipatory sentiments. They have embraced posthumanism as

a new method of self-identification that is driven by an individual's 'conscious mind' rather than the prescribed ideologies of society's 'complex systems'. By fusing with technology, the posthuman has the ability to [...] escape the human autonomy of, those with patriarchal 'wealth,

power, and leisure' [...] the Post-Internet generation has fused with the digital structures of cyberspace, rendering them 'posthuman' (Waugh 163).

Often the desire to escape human autonomy is portrayed in music as vocals being manipulated and synthesized in various ways. Sasha Geffen notes in a review of Holly Herndon's *PROTO*, an album of extensive vocal manipulations, that it is her most humanistic work despite being also her most technologically adventurous; She notes that many of her post-internet colleagues and other contemporary "musical cyborgs" such as Fever Ray and Charli XCX follow a lineage in pop music where the most notable innovators in vocal manipulation have historically been women – Wendy Carlos in the 1970s, Laurie Anderson in the 1980s, Cher's *Believe* in the 1980s – speaking of

a gender-transgressive impulse within cyborg performance: a desire to use technology to break open the body's perceived boundaries and take flight away from the repressive and the mundane (Geffen)

Carlos is notable not only for her innovative use of an early vocoder-type filter on her vocals but also for being one of the first public figures to open up about her gender reassignment surgery in the late 1970s. Not to dilute the relation between the things too simplistically but it seems that gender dysphoria and gender fluidity alike find their corresponding representation in augmenting the inherently human tenor of vocals, synthesizing the real to come closer to an internal truth. Even after her shift to employing her own image, SOPHIE has continued using various filters to mask the voices of her and other singers to the point where it is often impossible to tell who is behind the vocals without looking at the song credits.

At this point, it must be noted that while posthumanism is a widely used term in post-internet writings, it can have varying meanings, not of all them inherently preoccupied with the role of technology. At times, though, the term is used as a practically interchangeable concept with transhumanism. This is true of much of accelerationist writing in as well. Transhumanism seeks to develop technology to specifically enhance human capacities and, crucially, to make these technologies widely available (Bostrom 11-12) The aforementioned xenofeminist approach to emancipatory use of technology is therefore a transhumanist agenda as well.

SOPHIE continues the theme of fluid identity into *Faceshopping* wherein shaping one's appearance is explored in a transhumanist sense.

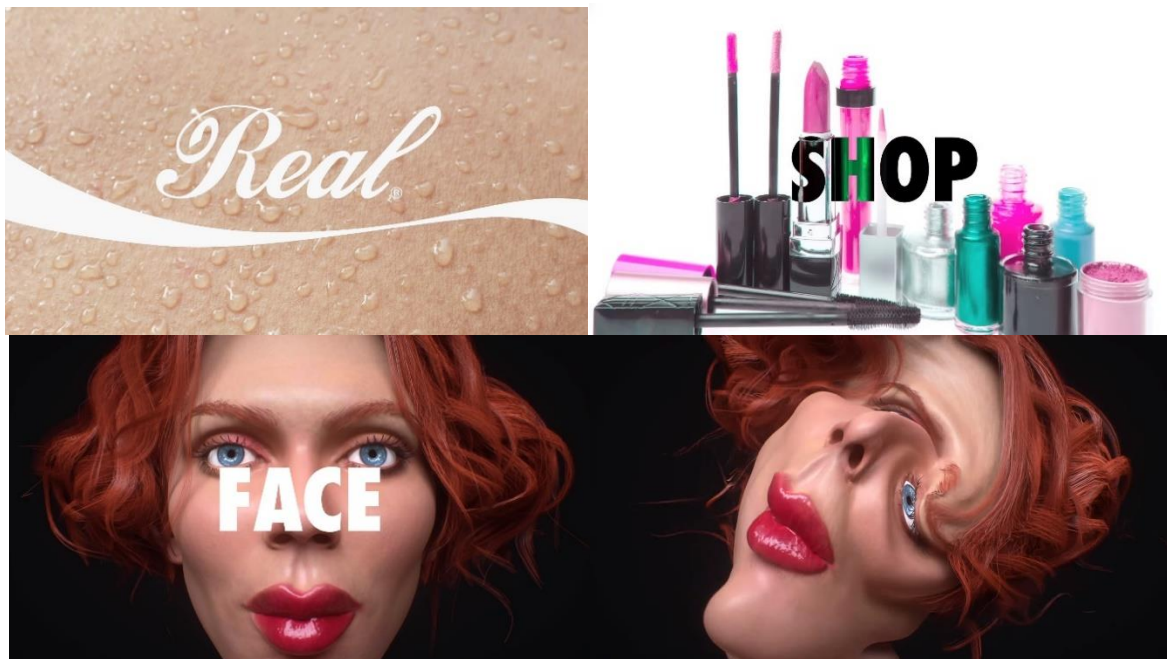
My face is the front of shop

My face is the real shop front

My shop is the face I front, front

I'm real when I shop my face (SOPHIE – *Faceshopping*)

Again, the lyrics go beyond naturalist definitions and attest how technology can be used to express an inherent sense of realness more accurately. To SOPHIE, transgender identity and transhumanism are connected concepts. Characteristically for post-internet art, this is done in conjunction with a commodification of oneself for the virtual plaza as the music video illustrates by superimposing the swirl of the Coca-Cola logo onto human skin (see figure 22) and cutting between beauty products and SOPHIE's face, periodically contorted into unnatural configurations of itself (see figures 23-25). Molding one's face, photoshopping it and selling one's appearance, are the new real.



Figures 22-25. music video for SOPHIE – *Faceshopping* music video

The notion of posthumanism in the music of Death Grips is explored via an oppressive power dynamic where technology is fusing with the body but the individual has little power over it. The blurring lines between body and technology are a prevalent theme and the sexual extent of that is examined perhaps most notably on *Artificial Death in the West*.

“She shoot pussy through your chest, you die” at the end of every chorus links the concepts of sex, death and technology together in a characteristically economical and vulgar fashion. It bears mention here that the term ‘death grip’ can refer to either the tight grip a human makes with their

first when fearing for their lives or to a Death grip syndrome where a man is unable to experience sexual pleasure from traditional sex due to excessive and forceful masturbation (Pearl). While the syndrome itself is not widely recognized scientifically as a medical condition, the similarities of the syndrome and Death Grips' sexual thematic are striking nevertheless.

Hole in this platinum ship of fools, nomadic rule, concept, no rules

Mobile shrine of this destitute wasteland mute

Screamin' at me, winkin' at me, like I love it

Fucking with me... Fuck it!

While a 'ship of fools' has been a known term ever since Plato coined it, given how prone the group is to evoking figures like Manson and expressing their own techno-anxieties, the term is likely to be a reference to a short story of the same name written in prison by Ted Kaczynski, known as the Unabomber, who believed in destroying technology and the industrialized society. This would mark the second time that the group has referenced Unabomber since the line "setting off Unabombs inside your dome" (Death Grips – *Takyon*). Kaczynski's short story details the journey of a ship that crashes into icebergs because the crew and passengers could not stop fighting about personal injustices, meant as a parable about leftists focusing their energy on secondary reforms rather than trying to save humanity from the industrial machine (Eggen and Cates). In the song, technology is specifically influencing humanity by catering to their sexual desires. The mobile shrine winking at the protagonist suggests that the sexual act is of a masturbatory nature happening with the help of mobile devices. Yet the lyrics describe the setting in such a disorienting manner that an accelerated symbiosis of humans and technology must be considered.

Slit bled like my wrist, I suck it dry like from the tit

Which nipple's mine? Read the signs, still can't decide (Death Grips – *Artificial Death in the West*)

The blurring of body and technology is such that the protagonist cannot tell his own body apart from the other human-like entity he is engaging with. The sexual excitement of sucking a breast is equated to the sucking of his own blood, both depicted here as self-absorbed actions that add to his self-destruction. Apart from the aforementioned line of the chorus, another human is acknowledged

as something to be rejected, in the twice repeated shout of “Don’t touch me, bitch!”(ibid.). The yearning for sexual gratification not tied to a discernible human contact is more akin to an addict trying to repeat or improve their last dosage.

Feel like I'm chasing after me

Feel like dead weight in a sea of Vaseline (ibid.).

A somewhat similar theme to *Artificial Death in the West* is explored in Mykki Blanco’s music video for *Loner*. In it a number of people are seen lying on a bed with VR glasses on and writhing around in pleasure, presumably watching some sort of VR porn (see figure 26).



Figure 26. Mykki Blanco feat. Jean Deaux – *Loner* music video

The isolation from human interaction is highlighted ironically as the people are all lying in the same bed, yet not touching each other or perhaps even aware of their presence as they react to the VR experience designed for their solitary pleasure. In *Artificial Death*, the rejection of human contact and his distrust of others is further intensified by the paranoid sensation of being surveilled all the time, expressed in the oft-repeated line “Watching me watching me watch them watch me” (ibid.). Elsewhere the sexual theme is consistently linked to degradation, dissociation or death.

Accustomed to these satin glitches, drippin' from my casket's innards

Charmer play me out the basket, last image I saw was splintered

My reflection, I wasn't in it, in slow motion, I give in [...]

Hopeless premonitions

Tomorrow didn't come, some say it's hiding, but they're the ones who've hidden

Euphoria followed by visions of peasants eating pigeons [...]

Try not to dwell on my cell, my empty shell shedding me (ibid.).

The 'cell' as a double entendre evokes either his cell phone or a prison, the latter meaning further suggested by the subsequent line that refers to his body as an empty shell and leaving that body perhaps being the artificial death that the song alludes to. Whether it is his technological device or his bodily form, they are intertwined in meaning and depicted as something harmful to attempt not to be given full power to. Further interpretation of this line could suggest that the biological body has become so interchangeable from technology that its demise registers only as an artificial death or perhaps these are the last dying words of the biological human that is to transform into a new transhuman version of himself, killing the old self in the process.

7. Modes of audience interaction

I have presented interpretations on how Death Grips depicts a subjective experience of an accelerationist reality in a dystopian context. While the content of the music and the accompanying visual art presents an artistic expression of accelerationism and it enhances the prevalence of accelerationist discourse in the popular arts and in the public consciousness, the band's interactive internet presence is a crucial part of their relevance and impact, in accelerationist terms as well. The interaction with their audience, their processual post-internet approach to artistry and the alternating registers within their work all combine together a whole spectacle that is necessary for understanding the band's influence and the responses of its audience.

These factors are not merely notable for analyzing a singular body of work and the influence that it has on its specific audience but also for what they suggest as discernible features of a contemporary zeitgeist. Taking the typical discourse employed by the audience as a representative sample of a more widely employed register in subculture discourse, I will analyze the implications of this particular discourse influencing the mainstream and the wider societal phenomena it indicates.

7.1 Switching between registers

The fan interaction has made its way into influencing their recordings as I previously detailed with the "JENNY DEATH WHEN" meme or with the origins of naming their intro track on their *Year of the Snitch* album with the phrase *Death Grips Is Online*. A fairly innocuous tweet from a listener that merely said "Death Grips is online" was noticed by the band who then tweeted the same phrase a day later, prompting their online audience to tweet the same thing in droves. This online happening has since then been repeated a couple of times; it starts by Death Grips tweeting the phrase, their audience then tweet the phrase with an attached picture, often a "dank meme" of some sort, of which the band will then retweet to their timeline in rapid succession (Van Metre).



Figure 27. ‘Death Grips is online’ meme

Death Grips alternate between crass meme-rock (‘Have a sad cum bb’ was readily printed on official shirts days after that song’s release) and equally crass anti-corporatism (No Love Deep Web’s (in)famous cover) seemingly by the minute, engaged in a never-ending game of ideological rock-paper-scissors (CClose).

Surely nothing new for the field art studies that an artist’s expressions would be difficult to analyze for their “exact meaning” but in the case of Death Grips, the obtuseness can be in part related to their affinity to reminiscent online communities. Their persona allows for a tonal distance that makes the intent ambiguous while the antagonistic behavior and content further alienate those who are not willing to engage with the art on those terms. Simultaneously, this reinforces the bond between the band and their audience as the audience feels they are familiar with the register and can more readily interpret the deviations thereof.

Anthony Fantano once likened listening to Death Grips to joining a gang. You have to work through painful, unpleasant initiations, but once you’re in, once you work through it, you feel a sense of both exclusivity, and adrenaline-fuelled irresponsible freedom (Scott).

Even the initiated may sometimes feel that some of their work can seem like dead serious art and an elaborate in-joke all at once. *Jenny Death*, which was supposed to be their last album, ends with *On GP* – not counting the instrumental outro track – that in its register seems removed from their normal absurdity and tonal distance as Ride distances himself from his artist persona when he mentions his real name at the end of an uncharacteristically straightforward verse.

I live down the street from you've

Noticed me, I've never seen you

Wonder what the fuck I do

Listen up, you nosy bitch, listen close

My most recent purchase, old black rope

Gonna learn how to tie it, hang it in my chamber

Perfect reminder, occult I'm made of

Come try it out whenever you wanna

Last night, 3:30 in the morning, Death on my front porch

Can feel him itching to take me with him, hail death

Fuck you waiting for

Like a question no one mention

He turns around, hands me his weapon

He slurs, "Use at your own discretion, it's been a pleasure, Stefan" (Death Grips – On GP)

The song in its entirety details his grim outlook on the meaninglessness of life, how tempting it would be for him to kill himself and what ultimately keeps him from doing it. While he expresses that he is a regular person, like his audience as he mentions living down the street from them, he makes sure to clarify that his lyrics having a preoccupation with death and dying is no joke. As the audience is clamoring to know more about the elusive front figure, he taunts them “Come try it out

whenever you wanna” (ibid.) highlighting the pressures created by the parasocial interaction paradigm of celebrity culture, audience demanding excessive access to the commodified individual.

The second half of the song then turns from addressing the audience to addressing his own inner circle.

Don't you worry, impossible for anything to be a big deal

I'm in no weary, my vital post dated

But clearly been ages since life had appeal (ibid.)

Acceptant of the fact that nothing ultimately matters to him, he reassures that his state should not be a source of worry for others. Sympathy for his close circle is the only reason for him not kill himself and that the difference between dying and keeping on living barely registers at all.

My friends and family won't understand

So I stay in the end, don't make none to me [...]

All the nights I don't die for you

Wouldn't believe how many nights I ain't died for you (ibid.)

At the time, the song registered as a powerful ending to a short-lived, yet prolific discography. Behind all of the controversy and trolling, here was the real person behind it all baring his soul and perhaps revealing part of the reason why the band would not want to go on any longer. Their mark on the music industry had been made and in the context of their recorded work up to that point, *On GP* reads like a final statement.

Yet, as noted, the band did not end up being disbanded for a long time at all and on their follow-up album, *Bottomless Pit*, the concept of suicide by hanging is brought up on *Eh* as one of many things that Ride is apathetic towards, responding repeatedly to everything with a subdued utterance of ‘eh’.

I'm way too loose like

Catch me hanging from my noose like, eh (Death Grips – *Eh*)

In this moment, the musical accompaniment pauses and the ‘eh’ is stretched to a long phlegmatic vowel, emphasizing how comically lackadaisical Ride is even when killing himself. Arguably it still indicates a similar outlook on suicide as *On GP* albeit with a stark contrast in delivery.

Originally, *On GP* was released as a single with a visual accompaniment of the band members in the echo chamber of a studio listening to the song on high-end speakers and sitting almost completely still in concentration, an apt counterpart to the gravitas of the content. Then only a day later the group released the official music video that has no apparent relation to the song’s content and instead features an unidentified man first vaping an e-cigarette and then continues with a procession of him doing a variety of magic tricks for the camera. Perhaps it could be intended as a continuation of the themes of suicide and magic tricks in *Up My Sleeves*. Nevertheless, it is often cited by fans as one of their worst music videos (Reddit) while admittedly, many of their other music videos have also featured puzzling imagery that underscore the intensity of the musical content. *Giving Bad People Good Ideas* is one of their sonically heaviest songs, resembling black metal in its blast beat drum patterns and staccato guitars. Its music video, however, consists of close-ups of an old shoe being mangled with hands and its torn sole forced to “lip-sync” to the song. The lyrics of the song yet again boast about their effect on the audience and refer with disdain to those who cannot keep up with their ever-shifting style.

Those who can’t adjust

Ten fold dismantled pus

Operandi minus modus (Death Grips – *Giving Bad People Good Ideas*)

The reference to a mode of operating without modus, the actual mode, suggests that band feels free from limiting their expression by any rules or conventions. The song title itself indicates, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, that their content is more advanced than its audience. Another song from the same album, *BB Poison*, features a line

Zach hit them off like, "It won't lit," they shit bricks (Death Grips – *BB Poison*)

‘*It won’t lit*’ was originally a tweet sent from the Death Grips account two months before the release of the album. No context was provided for the tweet, as per usual, and it left their fans struggling to decipher its meaning in various online discussions. At this point it seems like the band is intentionally reveling in the fact that a lot of their art can be ambiguous in its meaning and

simultaneously even the most nonchalant remark by them has the potential to be turned into a meme even when the intent behind it is unclear. The meaning can be said to form in how the process of interaction with the audience transforms it, while simultaneously it remains ambiguous behind the shared tonal distance that reinforces the audience's sense of exclusivity. This adds to the fact that as the audience has been able to influence the art directly and a majority of their "finished" material is made downloadable for free, in finalized album mixes and in stems for accessible reshaping of the material, the ownership and authorship over the band's art are in constant flux

7.2 Internet after cyberutopianism

The time in which Death Grips was formed and then quickly rose to prominence, the early 2010s, was marked by a number of political events involving significant use of internet in what Nagle calls cyberutopianism. Along with the already-mentioned Anonymous hacktivist movement and Wikileaks, it was the time of phenomena such as Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring and other public-square mass protests that all had their origins in people organizing them first and foremost online. All of this happening in close succession was characterized as a leaderless digital counter-revolution (Nagle 10). However, one by one the initial promises of those movements were betrayed in the subsequent years: without a leadership or a clear mission plan, Occupy demonstrators were forced to abandon their camping posts set up on public property while in the Middle East the Egyptian revolution led to the rule of the Muslim brotherhood and military dictatorships reinstated their power. Due to an increased public pressure, The Anonymous along with unaffiliated 4chan users sympathetic to them abstained from expressing themselves on the boards, creating in their wake an absence of their left libertarian left-leaning discourse which was then filled by the more right-leaning anti-PC troll culture (Nagle 11-14).

To label Death Grips cyberutopianists would be a massive stretch since they were so clearly antagonistic and wary of technological process from the start. Still, it is interesting to note a mirroring evolution in how the more disruptive nature of internet began to emerge right after the band achieving a level of mainstream success by portraying a somewhat more romanticized presentation. Before forcing the world to deal with the dark underbelly of internet culture, they release *The Money Store*. Comprised largely of *Music from Saharan Cellphones* samples, in a sort

of celebration of anti-establishment peer-to-peer trading, the album closes with its allusions to Wikileaks and the Anonymous movement in the song *Hacker*. At this time, both Wikileaks and Anonymous would have been described as having liberal and leftist goals – the alliances of both have been notably more difficult to summarize in subsequent years. *Hacker* also expresses an uncharacteristically encouraging sentiment to others, albeit still remaining typically vague.

Be the freak, you wanna see

Just don't follow me [...]

Shed my skin, leave it for the homeless to sleep in (Death Grips – Hacker)

The request not to follow in his path and the shedding of skin suggest an ever-evolving, impossible-to-catch style, yet hoping to inspire like-minded activity while still remaining typically vague for a Death Grips lyric. As said, the album closes with this and the “story” continues six months later with *No Love Deep Web*. Again, its cover is an uncomfortably crude picture of an erect penis. The album opens with *Come Up and Get Me*, its abrasively pulsating bass synths providing the backdrop for paranoid ramblings about an anticipated a fight to the death. Overall, the chameleon-like style based in eclectic samples is replaced with an ominously minimal and bass-heavy sound. The hooks are about how “it’s all suicide” (Death Grips – *World of Dogs*) or how “you’re fit to learn the proper meaning of a beatdown” (Death Grips – *No Love*). Ride boasts that “I’m the coat hanger in your man’s vagina” (Death Grips – *Deep Web*) but also in the middle of the same song, admits “Hate myself more than you ever could” (ibid.). The album closes with Ride fittingly rapping about “Euphoria followed by visions of peasants eating pigeons” (Death Grips – *Artificial Death in the West*). The album was tentatively titled just *No Love* but changed during the recording as the band started learning more about the deep web culture and reflecting that in their work, including the promotional campaign for *No Love Deep Web* that was all based on decoding encrypted messages and instructions through the deep web.

Before 4chan and Anonymous parted ways, their shared belief seemed to be about freedom to distribute information and to express anything they wanted to. The Church of Scientology tried to keep a video of Tom Cruise rambling about Scientology offline and 4chan did everything in their power to keep it resurfacing online while Anonymous attacked Paypal and American Express, not necessarily in a protest of their corporate nature but rather because they had frozen Julian Assange’s assets and in support of his similar beliefs about the distribution of information (Beran). Anonymous seemed to splinter soon afterwards and some of them did continue with apparent anti-

corporate agendas. Of course, it is impossible to know if further acts by people labelling themselves as Anonymous were in fact original members who parted ways due to differences in agenda or if they are new hackers taking on the name. Nevertheless, what was left at 4chan, was the previously described anti-PC troll culture.

Indeed it did try its mightiest to be nihilistic, to hate, to deny, to shrug, to laugh off everything as a joke like all teenage boys do (the board was mostly young men). This effort was of course impossible. The attempts to be “random”, like a Rorschach test, painted a portrait of exactly who they were, the voids filled in with their identity, their interests, their tastes. The result was that 4chan had a culture as complex as any other society of millions of people, anonymous or no (ibid.).

4chan has codified the characteristic discourse to its own set of rules that reflect their specific community standards, not beholden to typical standards of “decency” on other forums. Similarly, Reddit has different rules for different subreddits that vary based on their specific interests. Regarding the general rules of 4chan,

like everything it did, these were constructed piecemeal from pop culture. Rule #1 was taken from Fight Club’s Rule # 1, “Don’t talk about 4chan” [...] of course, it’s relevant to note here the themes of Fight Club itself, a film about a male collective that regains its masculinity through extreme acts after it has been debased by modern corporate culture (ibid.).

Like the fictional Fight Club, it too might have seemed like more of an isolated subculture at first but its discourse has had a definite influence on the mainstream, not only in their direct trolling campaigns but also in their discourse influencing a transgressive strain in contemporary politics.

7.3 Implications of new discourses

Due to 4chan’s and Reddit’s insistence on anonymous posting it is impossible to know who is behind a particular post and there is no digital footprint connecting to other posts. Theoretically, one can take a hundred different posts and it could be one person posting them all or it could be a hundred different posters. Users on Death Grips forums use this ambiguity to sometimes pretend as

if a band member were behind some of their own posts. The most common example is the meme phrase “Zach here, thanks man” which is often posted to Death Grips discussions, originating from a response to a birthday message posted to Zach Hill on /r/deathgrips (Crepeault). Considering their previous ways of behaving online, it would not be at all surprising if the band was actually behind one or more of these comments but so far no such revelation has been made. Nevertheless, the meme offers their audience an outlet of seemingly interacting with a more “relatable representation” of the cryptic band, even if under false pretenses (ibid.).

In whatever way one regards the band’s antics, they do represent something noteworthy and new in popular music. Their actions might have still been met with widespread disapproval when they abruptly cancelled an entire tour in 2012 and then only ten days later released a music video for *Hustle Bones* which consists of two repeated visuals: Ride rapping with a beer bottle in hand, spilling the beer everywhere, and a camera mounted inside of a tumble dryer capturing a big heap of cannabis, pill bottles and cash rolling around. As a visual accompaniment, it is completely consistent with their aesthetic but the timing and context made it seem almost like a taunt at their audience. In 2013 the audience reacted violently to their nonappearance at the Lollapalooza show and were again incensed in 2014 when they suddenly dropped out of yet another full slated tour with Soundgarden and Nine Inch Nails.

Yet somehow the audience that remained with them grew only more devoted. From defiantly leaking a penis-covered album in breach of their record contract to undermining their sinister music with silly memes, even the perceived antagonism against the audience is in line with consistently acting against expectations. To summarize, the band has essentially “broken every rule of music promotion”, yet stayed successful and relevant through it all (Fantano 2015b) because the shared sense of exclusivity between the band and the 4chan audience has allowed it to expand and evolve.

In their own words, the band tries to recreate the sensation of the internet in its chaotic nature to encompass the “lowest-level activity side-by-side with the highest intellect” all at once (Hill qtd. in Greene). Their fascination for specifically the “dark underbelly” of the internet continues the vein of transgression in their works that has perhaps on occasion relied on the virtue of transgression due to its shock value more than anything else. While the band has arguably evolved or at least created sonic variations of their stylistics on every release, the “Death Grips template” is consistently abrasive and antagonistic in its nature, but crucially also vague enough to support a variety of interpretations. Their interviews may speak of progressive notions but the ambiguous nature of the music does lend itself to some troubling connotations as well.

Similarly, the affiliation with the 4chan user base makes them a part of a larger phenomenon. The engagement with an “apolitical” platform and its specific community of the Death Grips audience strengthens the discourse that characterizes the whole platform and its more blatantly hateful boards as well. To repeat, the fact that a lot of this discourse can be described by hiding behind anonymity and a tonal distance makes it ambiguous if the surface-level intent of it is real or merely a performance. The distinction between the two is perhaps of little importance as the appearance is its defining feature, an image made superior to its underlying reality in the spectacle.

Just as early industrial capitalism moved the focus of existence from being to having, post-industrial culture has moved that focus from having to appearing (DeBord 17).

Contemporary social media interactions can be described by both the concepts of Baudrillardian hyperreality and DeBordian society of spectacle.

There is absolutely no line drawn between simulated entertainment and everyday personal interactions [...] thusly the hyperreality of social media interaction has fabricated the appearance of a personified and tangible relationship with the spectacle (Cavaoli).

Social media makes it significantly easier to engage with the spectacle and it may be irrelevant if the participation with it is born from a supportive or oppositional stance.

Whether we love Trump or hate him, is it possible we are all equally addicted consumers of spectacular images he continues to generate? Have we been complicit in the rise of Trump, if only by consuming the images generated by his person and politics? Do the critical counter-images that protesters create constitute true resistance, or are they instead collaborating with our fascination with spectacle? (Zaretsky).

Not to make too neat comparisons here but perhaps it is not that singular of a phenomenon that the Death Grips spectacle is not notably affected by potential “career suicides” and that they only add to the chaotic semiotics of the spectacle that are a part of the charm. Similarly, it does not seem to matter if Trump commits more career suicides then one can care to count because it is all a part of one continuous spectacle and the spectacle not only survives these, it thrives on them. Fact-checked news about the administration and Trump’s claims of “fake news” are leveled into a shouting match against one other in which Trump has the louder voice and the bigger spectacle. “There is no such thing as bad publicity” seems to finally be a true adage as the counter-attacks only reinforce the power of the spectacle. When someone blatantly ignores standards of practice to this degree and

creates new rules of common discourse, it seems it is already a lost battle to engage with it on its level because the spectacle encompasses the oppositional forces into it, adding sympathy for the one attacked against and validating their status for being powerful enough to opponents even attempt at undermining it. All of it is merely reinforcing the central image of the spectacle.

During the 2016 presidential elections, /pol/ received particularly heavy traffic and its users planned several grassroots campaigns to disseminate disinformation against Hillary Clinton; it is also rumored that the infamous “Pee tape”, the alleged recording of Trump being urinated on by a prostitute, is a hoax created by /pol/ users, a straw man to validate a bias towards liberal media and the allegations of their “fake news”. As to why Trump has met with general board-wide support from 4chan, the reasons for it can be analyzed as being “either for his politics or his role as “the ultimate troll” that embodied 4chan’s ideals of societal chaos” (Meadows). It is a natural choice of figurehead for a community that expresses themselves with Pepe the Frog, the meme that has been also appropriated as an alt-right symbol, by molding the meme to fit their personal situations and a wide variety of contexts.

Pepe symbolizes embracing your loserdom [...] a value system, one reveling in deplorableness and being pridefully dispossessed. It is a culture of hopelessness, of knowing “the system is rigged”. But instead of fight the response is flight, knowing you’re trapped in your circumstances is cause to celebrate. For these young men, voting Trump is not a solution, but a new spiteful prank [...] Trump’s farcical nature didn’t seem to be a liability, rather, to his supporters, it was an asset. All the left’s mockery of Trump served to reinforce his message as not only an outsider, but as an expression of rage, despair, and ultimate pathetic Pepe-style hopelessness (Beran).

Whether 4chan actually believed in Trump ultimately acting as a force of good for the disenfranchised, battling corrupt government and “draining the swamp” is unclear but the attitude influencing their endorsement is still embedded in a lack of hope in corporate capitalist culture. The result of this is then, similar to Death Grips, a self-destructive inclination to “own” one’s outsider status and to antagonize those that have rigged the system. Not a progressive attempt to actually better oneself or one’s status or but instead a reaffirming extension of the inclination for self-harm.

Just as the Death Grips subject matter can be viewed as an African-American embracing one’s own outsider status, the vagueness and ambiguity of the material allows for interpretations that reinforce the 4chan audience’s defeatist sense of being an outsider. The trolling and the memetic behavior by

the band only add validity to their audience's interpretation of it employing a shared form of discourse between them. The fact that it is seemingly apolitical in its ambitions yet also explicitly transgressive is an artistic gambit, a Rorschach test for the audience to fill in.

We perceive Death Grips as an ever-progressing cycle that's in constant collaboration with our fanbase and the general public. This [is] totally open source. It relates to the idea of putting 10 versions of Death Grips on tour at once; we take our ego out. We prefer it to be this open collaboration with the world (Hill qtd. in Pelly)

All of this is not so much a criticism of the band's work itself rather than a criticism of its elusive meaning that is formed in the audience's interpretation of it and the work's appropriation. Put another way, it is then a criticism of Death Grips as a post-internet band. While they may not have been appropriated as an alt-right symbol like Pepe, the meaning of their work is similarly meme-like in its characteristic to evolve through every interaction with the audience, art evolving as it becomes more and more divorced from its artist. Described as coming across increasingly like "sentient memes" (Copperman), the band often deliberately presents their works disembodied from themselves, like when their latest album *Year of the Snitch* was anonymously leaked to 4chan a day before its official release. As they minimize their personal representation by also discontinuing promotional interviews, the idea of an "open source collaboration" grants the audience a more equal role in the proceedings, an attempt to create a truly shared spectacle.

8. Conclusion

Death Grips can be discussed as an experimental hip hop band, as a surrealist gangsta rap group, as a new kind of rock band or a post-internet band among other genre definitions. The band has been difficult to categorize from the beginning and they have prided themselves on always being one step ahead of their audience, in more ways than one. If aesthetically they encompass a variety of different influences then the same can be said for their chaos-embracing content as well.

They certainly fit the definition of post-internet music, with their internet-specific content, their processual approach to art and their esoteric sampling, to name a few noteworthy attributes. Where they differ from their other post-internet contemporaries is mostly in Ride's portrayal of a masculine identity in crisis, vaguely antagonistic to everyone he sees as his opponents, acting out violently towards others and slowly self-destructing in the process. In contrast, many post-internet artists such as SOPHIE and FKA Twigs embrace the fluidity of gender and emancipatory possibilities of technology, resulting each in their particular presentations of a digital queer identity. Whereas some of these portrayals might be born out of gender dysphoria or just a desire to express oneself beyond the limits of a limiting body, Ride exhibits little signs of wanting to be something else than his masculine persona. Rather, the performance of a toxic masculinity is a manifestation of his oppressed status as a black man in white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy. As he is seen as a beast in society's eyes, it results in a self-fulfilling prophecy, a performance of acting like the beast while trying to survive by any means necessary. The repressed status is both a source of resentment at society and a sort of nihilistic outsider pride, the latter seen in the embrace of transgressive anti-capitalistic behavior and in the band's aesthetic elevation of all things low.

As far as their depiction of accelerationism is concerned, its realization is mostly perceived as amplifying already existing disparities with technology dominating the less privileged. Again, Death Grips adopts a more pessimistic stance compared to other post-internet artists whose thematic exploration of technology can be interpreted as having transhumanist and xenofeminist inclinations, whereas Death Grips views of the future is closer to the accelerationism of Nick Land. Not that they wish for it to be so, they just see no hope for a better outcome. This accelerationist pessimism contradicts some of their statements of promoting pro-individual cultural acceleration as moving past poisonous and repressive ideologies. Their embrace of the internet as the primary hub for their

art also speaks of the benefits of accelerationist ideas, of employing the inherent deterritorializing potential of the internet.

Yet it is their interactions with their audience that indicates perhaps their most notable relation to accelerationism. The band treats its approach to art as an open source collaboration with the world, involving the audience in the process in various ways. The most significant part of that audience is the community of fans on 4chan and Reddit who recognize the postmodern tonal distance and the transgressive register as its own. The most significant part of 4chan, however, is the controversial group of transgressive trolls who organize prank campaigns, spread disinformation and create outrageous memes that have influenced accelerationist rumblings in the mainstream, most notably Trump's election and Brexit. Alt-right's rise can be traced back to 4chan even more explicitly as some of the movement's most prominent figures of it come from that background, personally crafting their style of transgressive discourse in the corners of 4chan. While it is ultimately impossible to say how much overlap there is between the band's audience and the more politically disruptive users on 4chan, the leaderless digital revolution wrought such confusion and chaos that distinctions between them are almost irrelevant. Even if they were two entirely separate subcommunities, as the two significant sectors adhere to similar discourse, they both represent the larger whole and strengthen its influence.

I have not touched much at all on how empowering their music often feels which explains a lot of their appeal. Despite the oft-cryptic and challenging content, the music at the core is filled with high energy, innovative production and memorable hooks. As hard as their blood-pumping music is to categorize, the content itself is not much easier to boil down into a concrete stance or a value system. It is ambiguous, complex, and often contradictory with itself. I doubt that the outspoken feminist Björk would want to collaborate with the band if their content was unquestionably misogynistic or misanthropic. Instead one can interpret the content as turning the oppressor's language against itself, counter-revolution anthems against the white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Or one can say that it presents a masculinity in crisis where the protagonist has internalized the language of oppressive structures as a part of an all-encompassing self-destructive reaction to accelerationist capitalism. This reading is supported by the prevalent defeatism and self-destructive behavior.

Nevertheless, while the music may be embraced by a variety of people, their mostly white young male 4chan audience is such a notable democratic in their influence that their inclusion in the discussion about the band is practically mandatory, as it stands now at least. Since the band has in

the past surprised the audience with every new development, perhaps their open source collaboration with the world will take on a different form. After all, just like the 4chan trolls or the Red Pill community can create piecemeal ideology by picking and choosing bits from their favorite pop culture, sometimes regardless of the denotations of their origins, Death Grips are in their ambiguity ripe for co-opting into a variety of different interpretations that may then influence the subsequent output. They are the sentient memes of post-internet music whose meaning has the potential to evolve through every interaction with their audience.

Works Cited

- 4chan community support LLC. "4chan." *4chan*. 2019. Web. May 20, 2019
<<http://www.4chan.org/advertise>>.
- Abbas, Tahir. "Multiculturalism in the Age of Brexit and Trump." *Fair Observer*. May 14 2017. Web. May 14, 2019 <<https://www.fairobserver.com/region/europe/multiculturalism-brexit-donald-trump-british-uk-european-union-world-news-32403/>>.
- "Ai Weiwei." *Guggenheim*. 2019. Web. May 20, 2019 <<https://www.guggenheim.org/arts-curriculum/topic/ai-weiwei>>.
- Loner*. Dir. Anthony&Alex. Perf. Mykki Blanco feat. Jean Deaux. 2016. Music video.
- Badenhausen, Kurt. "America's most Miserable Cities." *Forbes* February 2 2011. Print.
- Barth, Chris. "Review: Death Grips - The Money Store." *Pretty Much Amazing*. April 24 2012. Web. October 26 2019 <<https://prettymuchamazing.com/reviews/death-grips-the-money-store>>.
- Baudrillard, Jean, and Sheila Glaser. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994. Print. The Body, in Theory : Histories of Cultural Materialism .
- Beckett, Andy. "Accelerationism: How a Fringe Philosophy Predicted the Future we Live In." *The Guardian*, May 11 2017. Print.
- Beran, Dale. "4chan: The Skeleton Key to the Rise of Trump." *Medium* February 14 2017. Print.
- Berardi, Franco "Bifo". "Accelerationism Questioned from the Point of View of the Body." *e-flux*.46 (2013) Print.
- Bostrom, Nick. "A History of Transhumanist Thought." *Journal of Evolution and Technology* 14.1 (2005) Print.

- Boyer, Jake. "Are Death Grips the most Important Hip-Hop Act of the Decade?" *High Snobiety*, sec. Music, June 21 2018, Print.
- Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519. Print.
- Calvert, John. "Death Grips' the Money Store: Track-by-Track." *The Quietus* March 27 2012a Print.
- . "No Love Deep Web." *Factmag* October 10 2012b Print.
- Campbell-Dollaghan, Kelsey. "The Internet's Ode to Music from Saharan Cellphones." *Gizmodo*. September 19 2014. Web. October 18, 2018 <<https://gizmodo.com/the-internets-ode-to-music-from-saharan-cellphones-1637031454>>.
- Carr, Sean. "System Blower: Importance of the Money Store." *Odyssey Online*, February 6 2017, Print.
- Cavaoli, Nick. "Trump, Tabloids and Twitter: "Spectacle Society", Celebrity Culture, and Politics in a Post-Truth World." *Medium*. January 10 2017. Web. March 27, 2019 <<https://medium.com/@nickcavaoli/trump-tabloids-and-twitter-spectacle-society-celebrity-culture-and-politics-in-a-post-truth-9428b86b5e5e>>.
- CClose. "CHECK THE CHAIN LINK: UNDERSTANDING DEATH GRIPS." *Snacked Up*. March 19 2015. Web. February 12, 2019 <<https://snackedup.com/2015/03/19/check-the-chain-link-understanding-death-grips/>>.
- Faceshopping*. Dir. Chan, Aaron, and SOPHIE. Perf. SOPHIE. 2018. Music video.
- Cohen, Ian. "Death Grips Year of the Snitch." *Pitchfork* June 28 2018 Print.
- Cooper, Leonie. "'We Wanna make People Fuck' – Read NME's Intense, Unseen Death Grips Interview from 2012." *NME* August 2 2016. Print.
- Copperman, Joshua. "Watch Car Seat Headrest Cover Death Grips in Festival Set." *Spin* July 10 2018. Print.

Corrigan, Zac. "Death Grips' No Love Deep Web: A Terminally Destructive Message." *World Socialist Web Site*, sec. Arts Review, December 13 2012. Print.

Crepeault, Jacob. "The Band that Launched A Thousand Memes: An Oral History of Death Grips." *The Antidote Mag* March 23 2015. Print.

Dead C. "GRIMIER THAN GRIME: DEATH GRIPS "EX MILITARY" MIX-TAPE [DOWNLOAD/REVIEW]." *Monster Fresh*. July 22 2011. Web. May 18, 2019 <<https://www.monsterfresh.com/2011/07/22/death-grips-exmilitary-download-review/>>.

"Death Grips - idk i just connect to the lyrics a lot." *Knowy Your Meme*. Web. April 2, 2019 <<https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1132006-death-grips>>.

Death Grips. *Bottomless Pit*. Third Worlds Records, 2016. Album.

---. "Death Grips." *Facebook*. 2019a. Web. May 20, 2019 <<https://www.facebook.com/deathgripz/>>.

---. "Death Grips." *Twitter*. May 5 2019b. Web. May 20, 2019 <<https://twitter.com/bbpoltergeist>>.

Double Helix. ---. YouTube, 2012a. Music video.

Death Grips. *Ex-Military*. Self released, 2011a. Album.

Death Grips. *Government Plates*. Third Worlds Records, 2013. Album.

Guillotine. ---. Perf. Death Grips. 2011b. Music video.

Death Grips. *Jenny Death*. Third Worlds Records, 2015. Album.

Death Grips. *The Money Store*. Elektra Records, 2012b. Album.

Death Grips. *Niggas on the Moon*. Third Worlds Records, 2014. Album.

Death Grips. *No Love Deep Web*. Third Worlds Records, 2012c. Album.

Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Repr ed. Detroit: Black & Red, 1983. Print.

Defraene, Pieter. "Exploring Post-Internet Music. A 101 on the net-aware movement." *humanhuman*. 2015.

Web. November 16, 2018 <<https://humanhuman.com/articles/exploring-post-internet-music>>.

Episode 39: Culture - Death Grips & Anti-Capitalism., 2017. Podcast.

Eggen, Dan, and Dominic Gates. "From Jail Cell, Unabomber Finds a Forum." *The Washington Post*, sec. Politics, July 27 2002, Print.

Fantano, Anthony. "Death Grips - The Powers That B (Niggas On the Moon / Jenny Death) ALBUM REVIEW." *Youtube*. March 23 2015a. Web. November 11, 2018 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKyWZeiRe8c&t=134s>>.

---. *An Intimate Evening with Anthony Fantano*, 2015b. YouTube.

---. *TND Podcast #57: How to Get into Death Grips Ft. Dominick Rabrun.*, 2017. Podcast.

I'M Your Doll. Dir. FKA Twigs. Perf. FKA Twigs. 2015. Music video.

Fukuyama, Francis. *The Great Disruption : Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order*. London: Profile Books, 1999. Print.

Galil, Leor. "Vaporwave and the Observer Effect." *Chigago Reader*, sec. Music, February 13 2013, Print.

Geffen, Sasha. "Holly Herndon - PROTO." *Pitchfork* May 14 2019. Print.

Gens, Mark. "A Critical Analysis of Art in the Post-Internet Era." *Gnovis*. Spring 2017 (2017) Print.

Ghana, Booneh, and Pitchfork. "Photos: R. Kelly, Beach House, Cat Power, Death Grips, Solange, More at Bonnaroo." *Pitchfork* June 16 2013. Print.

- Gieben, Bram E. "Death Grips: "There's a Lot of Recycling and Destruction in the Making of our Music".
The Skinny May 2 2012. Print.
- Glitsos, Laura. "Vaporwave, Or Music Optimised for Abandoned Malls." *Popular Music* 37.1 (2018): 100-18. *Cambridge Core*. Web. 2019/02/21.
- Grady, Constance. "The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained." *Vox*. July 2 2018. Web. March 4, 2019 <<https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/16955588/feminism-waves-explained-first-second-third-fourth>>.
- Greene, Jayson. "Death Grips." *Pitchfork* April 25, 2012 Web. October 11, 2018
 <<https://pitchfork.com/features/interview/8815-death-grips/>>.
- Grimes. *We Appreciate Power*. 4AD, 2019. Single.
- Halligan, Benjamin. "Tension of Exclusion: On Death Grips and the Californian Ideology." *A Dark California: Essays on Dystopian Depictions in Popular Culture*. Eds. Katarzyna Nowak-Mcneice and Agata Zarzycka. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2017. 62. Print.
- Harper, Adam. "Charting the evolution of post-internet music." *Red Bull*. October 4 Web. December 10, 2018 <<https://www.redbull.com/us-en/evolution-post-internet-music>>.
- . "Comment: Vaporwave and the Pop-Art of the Virtual Plaza." *Dummy* December 7 2012. Print.
- It's Okay to Cry*. Dir. Harwood, Nicholas, and SOPHIE. Perf. SOPHIE. 2017. Music video.
- Hiebert, Ted. *In Praise of Nonsense : Aesthetics, Uncertainty, and Postmodern Identity*. Montreal ; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012. Print.
- Hind, Mike. "A Beginners Guide to 4Chan: The Site You Never Knew was Influencing You." *The New European*, May 6 2017, Print.
- Hooks, Bell. *We Real Cool : Black Men and Masculinity*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Jackson, Robert. "Ordinaryism: An Alternative to Accelerationism. Part 1 – Thanks for Nothing."

Furtherfield. March 23 2014. Web. March 19, 2019 <<https://www.furtherfield.org/ordinaryism-an-alternative-to-accelerationism-part-1-thanks-for-nothing/>>.

Water Me. Dir. Kanda, Jesse, and FKA Twigs. Perf. FKA Twigs. 2013. Music video.

Kissick, Dean. "Is the Internet the New Street?" *i-D* March 16 2015. Print.

Klein, Jessica. "Here's the Dark Enlightenment Explainer You Never Wanted." *BREAKERMAG* March 1 2019. Print.

Korsgaard, Mathias Bonde. "Music Video After MTV - Audiovisual Studies, New Media, and Popular Music." PhD Aarhus University, Denmark, 2013. Print.

Labouria Cuboniks. *Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation.*, 2015. Print.

Hide. Dir. Ladoja, Grace. Perf. FKA Twigs. 2012a. Music video.

Weak Spot. ---. Perf. FKA Twigs. 2012b. Music video.

Larson, Jeremy D. "Death Grips – NO LOVE DEEP WEB." *Consequence of Sound* October 18 2012. Print.

Lilly, Mary. "'The World is Not a Safe Place for Men': The Representational Politics of the Manosphere." MA in Political Science University of Ottawa, 2016. Print. Ottawa, Canada: .

Matthews, Dylan. "The alt-right is more than warmed-over white supremacy. It's that, but way way weirder." *Vox*. August 25 2016. Web. March 26, 2019 <<https://www.vox.com/2016/4/18/11434098/alt-right-explained>>.

McClouskey, Maddie. "Why the MRA 'Manosphere' Isn't Actually Helping Men Cope with Rejection." *Everyday Feminism* January 4 2016. Print.

Meadows, Katie. "Digital Militarization: The Rise of the Manosphere." *Salient* October 1 2018. Print.

Minor, Jordan. "Drown yourself beneath the vaporwave." *Geek*. July 3 2016. Web. February 20, 2019

<<https://www.geek.com/tech/drown-yourself-beneath-the-vaporwave-1657121/>>.

Minsker, Evan. "Death Grips Not Playing Lollapalooza, Didn'T show Up to their Aftershow, Fans Destroy Band's Equipment." *Pitchfork* August 3 2013. Print.

Vernáculo. Dir. Mulhere, Rory. Perf. Future Brown. YouTube, 2015. Music video.

Murray, Robin. "Death Grips X Alec Empire." *Clash Music* May 10 2012. Print.

Mykki Blanco. *Cosmic Angel: The Illuminati Prince/Ss*. UNO, 2012. Album.

Nagle, Angela. *Kill all Normies: The Online Culture Wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the Alt-Right and Trump*. Alresford, Hants, United Kingdom: Zero Books, 2017. Print.

Newman, Jason. "Death Grips Break Up." *Rolling Stone* July 2 2014. Print.

NMEblog. "Meet Justice Yeldham – the Glass-Licking Nutter ‘Crossing the Line between Music and Bloodsport’." *NME* September 24 2009. Print.

Pearl, Mike. "Is it really Possible to Ruin Your Penis from Jerking Off Too Hard?" *Vice* August 28 2015. Print.

Pelly, Jenn. "Death Grips." *Pitchfork* December 4 2012. Print.

Pistol, Shit. "Death Grips: Satanic Hip-Hop with no Expectations." *Sabotage Times* February 9 2013. Print.

Pitchfork Weekly. "Death Grips Interview (DELETED)." *Youtube*. August 2 2017. Web. February 22, 2019
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KqVDVVrJBSE>>.

Powell, Mike. "Death Grips: A Eulogy." *Pitchfork* July 7 2014. Print.

"r/Depression Memes." *Reddit*. 2019. Web. May 20, 2019 <https://www.reddit.com/r/depression_memes/>.

- Ratliff, Ben. "Dada was Born 100 Years Ago. So what?" *The New York Times*, sec. Arts, July 8 2016, Print.
- Reynolds, Simon, and Joy Press. *The Sex Revolts : Gender, Rebellion and Rock'N'Roll*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1995. Print.
- Rooney, Cody. "Postinternet Art: New Media Narratives and the New Aesthetic." *Glossi Mag* July 17 2017. Print.
- Haze.Boogie.Life*. Dir. Sangra, Danny. Perf. Mykki Blanco. Pitchfork, 2012. Music video.
- Sattelberg, William. "The Demographics of Reddit: Who Uses the Site?" *Tech Junkie*. March 22 2019. Web. May 14, 2019 <<https://www.techjunkie.com/demographics-reddit/>>.
- Shaviro, Steven. *No Speed Limit - Three Essays on Accelerationism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. Print.
- Sherburne, Philip. "PC Music's Twisted Electronic Pop: A User's Manual." *Pitchfork* September 17 2014. Print.
- Siegler, Mara, and Emily Smith. "Elon Musk Quietly Dating Musician Grimes." *Page Six* May 7 2018. Print.
- SOPHIE. *Oil of Every Pearl's Un-Insides*. Transgressive; Future Classic; MSMSMSM, 2018. Album.
- Souter, Anna. "Post-Internet Art: The Search for a Definition." *Roman Road Journal* (2017) Print.
- themegoman. "Death Grips: Systems Shattering." *L.A. Record* April 30 2012. Print.
- Tombs, Jen. "Why Tumblr might be Hindering Your Mental Health." *Study Breaks* August 18 2018. Print.
- u/[deleted]. "Hey everyone, I'm doing an oral presentation on Inanimate Sensation, is there anything i'm missing?" *Reddit*. May 28 2019. Web. April 2, 2019 <https://www.reddit.com/r/deathgrips/comments/4c2hez/hey_everyone_im_doing_an_oral_presentation_on/>.

u/asasasasasasssxx. "Whats with all the politicizing of Death Grips?" *Reddit*. May 28 2019. Web.

<https://www.reddit.com/r/deathgrips/comments/86u60x/whats_with_all_the_politicizing_of_death_grips/>.

u/TheTrueChrisLuecke. "Best and worst Death Grips music video." *Reddit*. May 28 2018. Web. March 5, 2019

<https://www.reddit.com/r/deathgrips/comments/69gn9o/best_and_worst_death_grips_music_video/>.

Van Dalsem, Will. "Death Grips Gives Bad People Great Music." *Freelancer Magazine* June 4 2016. Print.

Van Metre, Elizabeth. "'Death Grips is Online' is Trending, so what does it Mean?" *The Daily Dot* December 8 2018. Print.

Ward, Christian. "Vaporwave: Soundtrack to Austerity." *Stylus*. January 29 2014. Web. February 20, 2019
<<http://www.stylus.com/hzwtls>>.

Waugh, Michael. "'Music That Actually Matters'? Postinternet Musicians, Retromania and Authenticity in Online Popular Musical Milieux." Doctor of Philosophy Anglia Ruskin University, 2015. Print.

Weingarten, Christopher R. "Review: Death Grips' 'Bottomless Pit' Sounds Like no Punk on Earth." *Rolling Stone* August 1 2016. Print.

"William Gibson." *Wikiquote*. February 7 2019. Web. April 2, 2019
<[https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/William_Gibson#Neuromancer_\(1984\)](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/William_Gibson#Neuromancer_(1984))>.

Wood, Gabe. "BANNED MEDIA MONTH #3: Music From Saharan Cellphones, by Sahel Sounds (2011)." *Sevencut*. January 6 2017. Web. October 11, 2018 <<http://www.sevencut.com/culturejam-bannedmediamonth-jan17/2017/1/4/banned-media-month-3-music-from-saharan-cellphones-by-sahel-sounds-2011>>.

Zaretsky, Robert. "Trump and the 'Society of the Spectacle'." *The New York Times*, sec. Opinion, February 20 2017, Print.

